DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 414 687 EC 306 032

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TITLE Case Studies of Talented Students Who Achieve and Underachieve in an Urban High School. Research Monograph 95120.

INSTITUTION National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, Storrs, CT.

SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.

PUB DATE 1995-09-00

NOTE 284p.

CONTRACT R206R00001

PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC12 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Asian Americans; Black Students; Case Studies; Cultural Differences; Disadvantaged Youth; Family Environment; *Gifted; *High Achievement; High School Students; High Schools; Hispanic Americans; Homogeneous Grouping; Parent Participation; Poverty; Puerto Ricans; *Resilience (Personality); Self Esteem; Sex Differences; Social Support Groups; Student Characteristics; *Underachievement; *Urban Education; White Students

ABSTRACT

This 3-year study compared characteristics of high ability students who were identified as high achievers with students of similar ability who underachieved in school. The 35 students attended a large urban high school comprised of 60 percent Puerto Rican students, 20 percent African American, and the remainder White, Asian, and other. Qualitative methods were used to examine the perceptions of students, teachers, staff, and administrators concerning academic achievement. The study found that achievement and underachievement are not disparate concepts, since many students who underachieved had previously achieved at high levels and some generally high achieving students experienced periods of underachievement. A network of high achieving friends was characteristic of achieving students. No relationships were found between poverty and underachievement, between parental divorce and underachievement, or between family size and underachievement. Successful students supported the concept of grouping in honors and advanced classes, had supportive adults in their lives, and participated in multiple extracurricular activities. High achieving females usually chose not to date. High achieving students characteristically had a strong belief in self and resilience to negative factors. Cultural and gender differences were also found. Case studies of the 35 students are included. (Contains approximately 250 references.) (DB)

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The University of Connecticut
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September 1995
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THE NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER ON THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

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The Directorate of the NRC/GT serves as the administrative unit and is located at The University of Connecticut.

The participating universities include The University of Georgia, The University of Virginia, and Yale University, as well as a research unit at The University of Connecticut.

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Dedication

This research monograph is dedicated to A. Harry Passow (1921-1996), a pioneer in the efforts to identify and serve gifted students from all ethnic and socio-economic groups.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the 35 young men and women who participated in this study for the time, information, insight, and inspiration they provided. We greatly appreciate the cooperation of these participants, their families, their teachers, and administrators.

We also acknowledge the contributions of the following research assistants at The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented: M. Katherine Gavin, Dale Bishop Schimmel, Amy Mullen, G. Fred Woodworth, Leticia Hernandez, and Mary Rizza.

We particularly acknowledge the comments of the external reviewers whose time and expertise improved this manuscript: Dr. Penny B. Kolloff, Dr. Sydney Moon, and Beverly Coleman.

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ABSTRACT

In this study, high ability students who were identified as high achievers were compared with students of similar ability who underachieved in school. Thirty-five students participated in this three year study which was conducted in a large urban high school. In this school, 60% of the students were Puerto Rican, and approximately 20% were African American and the remaining 10% were a mixture of White, Asian, and other racial/ethnic groups. Qualitative methods were used to examine the perceptions of students, teachers, staff, and administrators about the reasons that some academically talented students fail to achieve in school, while others who come from similar types of homes and families, achieve at high levels. The findings in this study indicate that achievement and underachievement in this urban high school are not disparate concepts. In many cases, students who underachieved had achieved at high levels in the previous year or semester in school. Some of the high achieving students also experienced periods of underachievement in school; however they were supported in their achievement by a network of high achieving peers who refused to let their friends falter in school. For these students, achievement was like walking up a crowded staircase. If students started to underachieve and tried to turn and walk down the staircase, many other students pushed them back up the staircase. Once, however, the cycle of underachievement began and a student went down that crowded staircase, it was extremely difficult to turn around and climb back up.

Other findings include the following: No relationship was found between poverty and underachievement, between parental divorce and underachievement, or between family size and underachievement. Students who achieved in school acknowledged the importance of being grouped together in honors and advanced classes for academically talented students. Successful students received support and encouragement from each other and from supportive adults including teachers, guidance counselors, coaches, and mentors. Students who achieved in school took part in multiple extracurricular activities both after school and during the summer. Most high achieving females in this study chose not to date in order to be able to concentrate their energies on their studies. High achieving students had a strong belief in self and were resilient about negative aspects of their families and their environment. Although parents of students in this study cared deeply about their children, their involvement in their children's high school education was minimal. High ability students who underachieved in high school acknowledged that their underachievement began in elementary school when they were not provided with appropriate levels of challenge. Students who underachieved in school did not exhibit the same belief in self, often came from families in which problems were evident, and were not resilient enough to overcome urban environmental factors such as gangs and drugs. The abilities of this group of young people were often unrecognized by their parents, teachers, and guidance counselors. Various cultural differences were found between students from specific cultural

groups who achieved and underachieved in school. Various gender differences were also found such as the importance of peer support for females who achieve in school.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This technical report chronicles the experiences of 35 intelligent young men and women in an urban high school. The report is written in the tradition of educational ethnography, and pseudonyms are used to preserve the anonymity of the school, the community, and the people who are described. Many of these young people succeeded and indeed, excelled in school, despite remarkable odds; and others failed, despite their high abilities. This ethnography is a written account and interpretation of the daily events observed during an intensive research project in the high school. In this study, four researchers spent a total of over 240 days during a two and a half year period in an urban high school in Centerfield, an alias for a large city in the northeastern section of the United States. Two of the researchers were White, one was Hispanic, and one was African American. The purpose of the study was to examine closely the experiences of high ability students in an urban high school environment in order to develop a better understanding of why some high ability youth achieve in this setting while others underachieve. Through ethnographic fieldwork, the study identified the patterns in school life experienced by high ability students. By examining differences between high ability students who achieved and those who underachieved, we hoped to be able to identify strategies that would enable urban students to realize their potential.

Talented students from culturally diverse populations have existed in large urban environments for generations; yet, many do not achieve at a level commensurate with their ability. Educators must acquire a better understanding of the educational needs of these students as many urban school districts address the educational needs of culturally diverse populations. The problems addressed in this study, therefore, were the experiences and needs of talented students in an urban setting and the factors that distinguish between talented youth who achieve and those who underachieve.

Background of the Study

It is estimated that one in three Americans will be a person of color by the turn of the century (Banks, 1991; Hyland, 1989). Demographic reports indicate that many urban neighborhoods have become increasingly poor, minority, and non-English speaking. By 1980, 81% of all African Americans and 88% of Hispanics resided in metropolitan areas; 71 and 50%, respectively, lived in the inner cities (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980). In a 1991 federal census report, the city of Centerfield reported a population which was 38.9% African American and 31.6% Hispanic (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991). Related demographic studies of school-age children in the United States provide information about the graduating class of the year 2000. For example, the Hispanic population, highly

concentrated in urban areas, has experienced the most dramatic growth in the last twenty years. The Census Bureau projects that by the year 2000, 18% of the youth population in our country will be Hispanic and that a decade later this will increase to 21%. The Hispanic population is also one of the most impoverished ethnic groups as 41% of the population currently lives in families whose income is below the poverty level (Dryfoos, 1990). Coupled with the expanding population figures is the contention that Hispanics are the most undereducated group in America. Currently, Hispanics have the highest dropout rate, 36%, of all major population subgroups and are disproportionately represented in a number of school programs. Hispanics constitute only 5% of those children enrolled in gifted programs (Hyland, 1989). At the high school level, Hispanics are invariably underrepresented in the honors, academic or college-bound tracks and overrepresented in general or vocational programs (Orum, 1986).

Many Hispanic, especially Puerto Rican, students are considered educationally at risk. For instance, educational data on Hispanic students reflect a picture of low achievement levels, high dropout rates, poor school attendance rates, higher placements in special education and remedial tracks, higher enrollment in segregated schools, and underrepresentation in gifted programs (Alvarez, 1992; Bradby, 1992; Meléndez, 1986; Passow, 1986; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988). This information continues to support major concerns related to the education of Hispanic students.

African American students also comprise a significant percentage in our urban high schools and their underrepresentation in educational programs for the gifted is a cause for great concern. In 1977, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm introduced legislation to include funding for gifted and talented minority and culturally different children (Davis & Rimm, 1989). In a keynote address before the National Forum on Minority and Disadvantaged Gifted and Talented, Chisholm (1978) identified the failure of our educational system to nurture the talents of gifted disadvantaged students, faulting American education for inadequate methods of recognizing talent among culturally different children. Historical precedents and lack of empirical data on appropriate identification processes and educational planning techniques have been noted as part of the reason for this failure (Baldwin, 1987). Authorities in gifted education argue that IQ and achievement tests cannot be depended upon to assess the capabilities of this population (Baldwin, 1977; Frasier, 1989; Hilliard, 1976; Torrance, 1971). Many intervening variables should be considered by educators in locating the hidden talents of the African American child (Baldwin, 1987).

Little current research focuses on minority achievement. Accordingly, talented students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds were identified as a priority in federal legislation entitled the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act and were the focus of this study. This priority is crucial to educators such as Joyce Oatman of Tilman High School in Chicago, Illinois. After teaching for 34 years in the inner-city public high schools on the South Side of Chicago, Joyce Oatman reminds us:

> People need to know that there are gifted children here. People who live in the inner city, in the barrio, or on the reservation need to know that their children are gifted. There's too much raw ability going through the cracks. If a child we might lose had the ability to cure cancer but ends up joining a gang or dealing dope, that's a double loss to the country. (Ryan, 1991, p. 15)

Oatman's concerns highlight the importance of examining the underachievement of talented youth. Underachievement is a perplexing problem for all educators. Although the literature describes various methods for identifying talented underachievers, most include recommendations that are either too vague or restrictive to be practical in school settings (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982). Programs for underachieving talented students are

categorized in two ways, those focusing on intensive counseling services and those implementing specific educational strategies (Pirozzo, 1982). Many programs implementing counseling techniques have had limited success due to one of the following: a lack of commitment on the part of the students and inadequate training of counselors concerning this particular population (Doyle, Gottlieb, & Schneider, 1979). Educational strategies focusing solely on the structure of the classroom environment have not proven successful (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982). Strategies that have worked are long-term, lasting at least one to two years (Whitmore, 1980); they combine cognitive and affective techniques (Crittenden, Kaplan, & Heim, 1984; Gonzalez & Hayes, 1988); and involve a parent component (Emerick, 1991; Whitmore, 1986).

In summary, several theorists have posited various explanations for the reasons minority and economically disadvantaged students do not succeed in school. Unfortunately, little research exists on talented students in an urban environment and this study is an attempt to add to the limited information on this population.

Methods and Procedures

Different qualitative research methods were used in this study of talented students in an urban environment. "Rather than studying people" ethnography means "learning from people" (Spradley, 1979, p. 3). Ethnography is the work of describing a culture, in this instance, the culture of talented males and females in an urban high school. "The central aim of ethnography is to understand another way of life from the native point of view" (Spradley, 1980, p. 3). Describing an urban high school environment naturally lent itself to ethnographic methodology. Case study research methods were used to investigate similarities and differences across participants and to summarize similarities and differences across cases that explain theoretical propositions.

In the last decade, a resurgence of interest has occurred regarding the use of case studies (Yin, 1984, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994). While criticized by such well known methodologists as Cook and Campbell in 1979, case study research is currently recognized across several disciplines as a valuable methodology (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1984, 1994). Methodologists differ in their beliefs about whether case studies are quantitative or qualitative or a mixed method, combining characteristics of both (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1984). As case studies involve in-depth study of a small number of purposively selected cases, they enable researchers to make analytical generalizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1984) through the use of matrices of evidence, data displays, tabulation of frequencies, examining the complexity of tabulations and their relationships, and putting information into chronological order (Yin, 1984).

Research Questions

What are the characteristics of the young people in urban schools who have high abilities but fail to demonstrate them in their school settings? How and why do some young people achieve in urban schools, while many young men and women who have high intellectual potential do not experience academic success? This study described the experiences of these students to provide insight about why the urban high school experience helped some students achieve academically while it had little influence on others. The study also attempted to describe how the urban high school experience is different for the two populations identified, students who achieve, and students who underachieve in school. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What do talented students in an urban high school expect from their school experience?
2. What support systems (family, school, community) are recognized by talented students in an urban environment?
3. What views do talented students hold of their urban high school environment?
4. What relationships guide the behaviors, attitudes, and aspirations of talented students in an urban environment?
5. Do gender differences exist between talented students (across cultures) who achieve and underachieve in school?
6. What experiences do talented Puerto Rican students who achieve and underachieve perceive as contributing to their underachievement?
7. What experiences do talented in African American students who achieve and do not achieve perceive as contributing to their underachievement?

Data Collection and Analysis

Researchers at The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) requested permission of an urban public school system to conduct the study at a large high school, called by the pseudonym of South Central High School. This school served a student population of 1,656, primarily Hispanic and African American youth, in grades 9-12 and was located in an urban area in the northeastern part of the United States. South Central High School was one of three high schools in the city and its population was the most culturally diverse. Approval for the study was granted by appropriate school personnel including the Assistant Superintendents for School Sites and for Support Programs and Services.

To obtain the subjects' perceptions, a combination of comparative case studies, participant observations, and ethnography were used to gather data. Participant observation is a strategy ethnographers use for listening to people and watching them in their natural settings (Spradley, 1979, p. 32). Observations or the "systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 79) were conducted. Data were collected over a period of two and a half years by four researchers. In this study, the first two researchers spent 187 days of an academic year primarily as observers, conducting observations at school, at home, and in the community. The third and fourth researchers spent a total of 53 days involved in data collection. The fifth researcher interviewed a selected sample of students during a two and a half year period. Observation data were collected from social, athletic, and academic settings. During school visits, the researchers collected observational data from the following sites: the students' academic classes, physical education classes in the gymnasium, swimming classes, the cafeteria, science labs, the school library, the art room, the automobile technology center, the school corridors while students passed between classes, the in-house detention center, and study halls. The researchers also attended after-school club meetings and activities, a morning Bible study prayer group, a pep rally, a musical concert, cultural assemblies, an academic awards assembly, field trips to college campuses, student meetings with college recruiters, football, basketball and hockey games, as well as several swim meets.

Approximately 40% of students were observed at home with parents, siblings, and relatives. While the academic setting remained the major focus of observation, information gained in school and through interviews led the research team to other observations and interviews in the community. These observations had no specific structure but were guided by an established procedure. The researchers' purpose was to approach the site as one who is new to the setting and to describe the physical and social setting of the site.

In-depth interviewing was conducted with the identified students, teachers, administrators, school counselors, coaches, parents, siblings and other relatives, community members, and other parties as they emerged through other data gathering techniques. These semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore a few general topics in order to gain information in "the subject's own words" as well as to "develop insight on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 135). The interviews were conducted for each case study in order to obtain a more complete understanding of the views of the participants themselves, providing a clear understanding of the experiences of talented students in an urban high school. By interviewing participants, a picture of what each participant believes is happening emerged allowing each person to tell his or her side of the story. Similar "grand tour questions" (Spradley, 1979, p. 86) were asked of all subjects in order to obtain each subject's viewpoint on the research questions guiding the study. For example, a student might have been asked, "Tell me about the extracurricular activities in this high school" and a more specific follow-up question might have been, "How has the Engineering Club assisted you in achieving academically?" The subjects' answers to the general questions guided the direction of the interview to obtain a deeper understanding of each subject's point of view.

Appropriate documents were also obtained from school records or requested from subjects for each case study. Formal documents, such as gifted program identification policies, as well as informal documents, such as samples of student work, the program from a winter concert, or posters advertising Student Council political campaigns, were collected. The review of documents provided a clearer picture of the urban high school culture being studied.

The total field study transpired across two and one-half years until data saturation was reached. Data "saturation" occurred when the information yielded had become redundant and did not offer useful reinforcement of information previously collected (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1982). Field notes and observation notes recorded during the observations, interviews and after document review, were as detailed and concrete as possible to keep inferences at a low level (Pelto & Pelto, 1978). These field notes, and copies of documents were coded and analyzed for patterns, themes, and topics using inductive and logical analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). As the patterns, themes, and topics emerged the researcher evaluated "the plausibility of these developing hypotheses . . . testing them against the data" and challenged the themes as they emerged by looking for alternative explanations for them (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 118).

Sampling Procedure

As a part of this ethnography, purposeful sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to select 35 young men and women for intensive case studies to investigate their perceptions about their achievement or underachievement in high school.

Of the 35 talented participants, 18 were demonstrating above average performance in academic subjects and were identified as achievers. Seventeen of the participants were performing below average academically and were identified as underachievers. Demographic data about the participants in this study are included in Table 1.

Table 1

Student Demographics for Grade Level, Race/Ethnicity, Test Information, QPA Average and Class Track

Student	Grade	Race/Ethnicity	Subject	Test Percentiles	Average QPA Class Track
Male Achievers					
Vaughn	12	White	Math	96	8.8/B
			Reading	96	H
Rafael	12	Hispanic	Math	88	8.9/B
			Reading	90	H
Lucio	11	Hispanic	Math	99	8.7/B
			Reading	99	H
Orlando	11	Hispanic	Math	94	11.4/A+
			Reading	85	H
Matteo	11	White	Math	97	8.8/B
			Reading	98	H
Wallace	11	African American	Math	88	6.3/C+
			Reading	88	H/A
Rob	11	White	Math	96	10.9/A+
			Reading	92	H/A
Alfred	9	African American	Math	99	10.2/A
			Reading	98	A
Jesse	9	African American	Math	92	9.7/A-
			Reading	96	H

Note. National achievement scores on either the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) or Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) taken in high school.
G = General, A = Academic, and H = Honors

(table continues)

Table 1 *(continued)*

Student Demographics for Grade Level, Race/Ethnicity, Test Information, QPA Average and Class Track

Student	Grade	Race/Ethnicity	Subject	Test Percentiles	Average QPA Class Track
Male Underachievers					
John	12	African American	Math Reading	86 99	4.4/D+ A/G
Benton	11	African American	Math Reading	90 96	4.0/D A/G
Mitch	11	White	Math Reading	99 96	4.9/C- H/A
Chico	10	Hispanic	Math Reading	99 93	1.8/D- A
Morgan	10	White	Math Reading	99 97	8.7/B H
Skip	10	White	Math Reading	94 82	1.7/D- A
Martin	10	African American	Math Reading	80 80	6.3/B- H/A
Greg	9	African American	Math Reading	91 48	2.5/D A/G
Kevin	9	African American	Math Reading	91 77	3.5/D H/A
Leo	9	African American	Math Reading	84 82	5.5/C H/A
Marwin	9	Hispanic	Math Reading	93 90	0.0/F H/A/G
Milton	9	Hispanic	Math Reading	97 99	1.8/D H/A

Note. National achievement scores on either the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) or Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) taken in high school.
G = General, A = Academic, and H = Honors

(table continues)

Table 1 *(continued)*

Student Demographics for Grade Level, Race/Ethnicity, Test Information, QPA Average and Class Track

Student	Grade	Race/Ethnicity	Subject	Test Percentiles	Average QPA Class Track
Female Achievers					
Alexa	12	Hispanic	Math Reading	94 98	11.5/A+ H
Nicki	12	White	Math Reading	91 95	11.0/A+ H
Mary	12	White	Math Reading	96 94	11.0/A+ H
Marisa	12	White	Math Reading	99 98	9.9/A- H
Jana	12	Hispanic	Math Reading	95 97	10.0/A- H
Rosa	12	Hispanic	Math Reading	90 98	11.1/A+ H
Toni	12	African American	Math Reading	78 90	10.6/A H
Tania	10	African American	Math Reading	93 91	10.6/A H
Claire	10	African American	Math Reading	92 90	9.3/B+ H

Note. National achievement scores on either the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) or Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) taken in high school.
G = General, A = Academic, and H = Honors

(table continues)

Table 1 *(continued)*

Student Demographics for Grade Level, Race/Ethnicity, Test Information, QPA Average and Class Track

Student	Grade	Race/Ethnicity	Subject	Test Percentiles	Average QPA Class Track
Female Underachievers					
Mandy	12	African American	Math Reading	92 86	7.3/B H/A
Sandra	12	Hispanic	Math Reading	98 98	8.6/B H
Rose Marie	10	Hispanic	Math Reading	98 82	6.7/B- A
Yvellise	9	Hispanic	Math Reading	93 90	6.9/B- A/G
Ivy	9	Hispanic	Math Reading	92 91	5.0/C- H/A

Note. National achievement scores on either the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) or Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) taken in high school.
G = General, A = Academic, and H = Honors

For the purpose of this study, achieving students were defined as those who had shown above average potential as measured by a standardized intelligence or an achievement test (above the 85th percentile using national norms) during his or her secondary school career or who had demonstrated superior performance in one or more academic areas. The participants were recommended by the high school's guidance counselors and administrators. Those students identified for the study as achievers met three of the following four criteria:

1. The student had been enrolled in an academically gifted program, or
2. the student was achieving at a superior level academically as evidenced by high grades, or
3. the student had received a teacher/counselor nomination, or
4. the student had received academic awards and honors.

Information such as school records, test information, outstanding performance in one or more academic areas, awards and honors, product information, and teachers' anecdotal records from an academic portfolio were used to document the label of high ability.

For the purpose of this study, underachieving students were defined as students with

high potential as evidenced by academic achievement or intelligence test results of above the 85th percentile using local norms, who were not achieving at the level expected, based on this potential. These students, for example, may not have been enrolled in any advanced level or honors courses. They might have been receiving lower grades than those that would be expected given their potential.

In addition to the test scores mentioned earlier, four of the following five criteria were used to select underachieving students for this study:

1. The student had been enrolled in a gifted program and had been previously achieving at a superior level academically as evidenced by grades, teacher observation, awards, or honors, or
2. the student had previously displayed consistent strong academic performance with grades of B or better in elementary and/or junior high school, or
3. the student was presently maintaining a grade point average of 2.0 or lower, or
4. the student was consistently enrolled in non-college or general classes, or
5. the student was no longer in school, having dropped out or become truant.

Data Coding and Data Analyses

The coding paradigm suggested by Strauss (1987) and Strauss & Corbin (1990) was used in this study. Data were coded for relevance to specific phenomenon within a given category for: "conditions, interaction among the actors, strategies and tactics, and consequences" (pp. 27-28). Three types of coding described by Strauss (1987) and explained below were used in this study.

Open Coding. The initial type of coding, known as open coding, involves unrestricted coding of all data involved by the careful scrutiny of field notes, interviews, cultural artifacts or any other pertinent documents. In open coding the researcher tries to identify concepts that seem to fit the data and "open up" the inquiry (Strauss, 1987, p. 29).

Axial Coding. After initial categories are determined, axial coding enables the researcher to intensely analyze one category at a time in terms of the coding paradigm discussed earlier. This enables cumulative knowledge to emerge about relationships between that category and other categories.

Selective Coding. A core category is defined as one "that is central to the integration of the theory" (Strauss, 1987, p. 21). When a researcher codes systematically and purposefully for the core category, selective coding occurs. In this stage, a core category is selected and coding is conducted to limit coding only to those areas which relate to the core category. The core category "becomes a guide to further sampling and data collection" (Strauss, 1987, p. 33).

Core Categories. A core category accounts for most of the variation in a pattern of behavior. "The generation of theory occurs around a core category" (Strauss, 1987, p. 34). Researchers using the methods of data analysis discussed by Strauss (1987) consciously attempt to identify a core category while coding data. Various core categories should be labeled provisionally, and then an attempt should be made to theoretically saturate those categories which may explain the problems or research questions being addressed. At this point, the relationships among categories are examined to determine the saturation of categories in the identification of the core category. Strauss (1987) suggested the use of

memos to identify the core category by its relationship to other categories. The following criteria, suggested by Strauss (1987), were used in this study to verify the core categories:

1. It was a central core related to other categories more than any other category.
2. It appeared frequently in the data.
3. It related easily to other categories.
4. It had clear implications for a more general theory.
5. As the details of the core category emerged through analysis, the theory advances.
6. The core category enabled the researcher to build maximum variation to the analysis as the researcher used the coding paradigm.

Coders and Core Categories

In this study, four of the five researchers coded all of the data, including all interviews and the variety of documents described earlier. Additionally, three other researchers from the staff of The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented coded interviews to verify codes. This team of culturally diverse research assistants from the NRC/GT spent several days examining the selective coding completed once the core categories were determined. These guidelines parallel those suggested by Strauss (1987).

The Development of Grounded Theory

Strauss (1987) and Glaser (1978) explain that the term grounded theory arrives from an emphasis on the generation of theory and the data in which theory is grounded. Strauss (1987) explains:

> Grounded theory is a detailed grounding by systematically and intensively analyzing data, often sentence by sentence, or phrase by phrase of the field notes, interview, or other document; by constant comparison, data are extensively collected and coded . . . thus producing a well-constructed theory. (p. 22)

All of the steps in the collection, coding, and analysis described in this executive summary were involved in the organization of the ideas emerging from data analysis into a conceptually woven, integrated theory. According to Strauss and Glaser, this theory is discovered and formulated in developmental stages in conjunction with the intensive analysis of data.

Case Studies of Four Participants

Four of the 35 case studies are described in this executive summary: one male achiever, one male underachiever, one female achiever, and one female underachiever.

Wallace

Wallace kept the sports commentators busy announcing his name. In any football game featuring South Central High School, Wallace, who was 6'1" and weighed 270 pounds, was the offensive and defensive tackle who could be depended on to produce in any crucial play. The public address system boomed with his name from kickoff to the final whistle. Because of his dependability and talent on the field, the South Central High fans looked upon Wallace as a local hero and the Centerfield area sports commentators had only praise for the young, African American athlete. Wallace, however, was a modest young man

who knew his talents were combined with much hard work to achieve this athletic success, and he explained his realistic outlook came from his upbringing at home.

> You come home feeling really proud. You're a champion! And Mom's reaction was "Okay, champion, it's your turn to do the dishes and don't forget to clean your room! You know, you're no better than anyone else." My parents were proud—tremendously! They congratulate me, but after it's over, it's "Go clean your room!"

Wallace had excelled in varsity football since his freshman year. During the winter months, he ran indoor track which he explained, "was simply the coach's breeding for football season." He won a gold medal for his shot-put throw in the State Inter-Scholastic Athletic Conference, breaking statewide records. Several colleges had their scouts attending South Central's games and investigating the promising young star. Wallace's mail had also included several letters from colleges inviting Wallace to visit their campus and chat with their coaching staffs. This attention was exciting, yet Wallace described how he dealt with the hype when he said, "I block it out. I go out there and concentrate, knowing what I have to do and I work hard."

Wallace and his younger brother, Derrick, a sophomore at South Central High School, lived with their parents in a modest apartment building in the south end of Centerfield. His father drove a taxi for the Yellow Cab Company and his mother was a nurse's aide at a convalescent home in their neighborhood. Neither parent had a college education but they instilled this dream in both their sons. Wallace's parents had plans for their boys and they wanted to be sure they "followed the right path." They insisted that athletics was not the only ticket and instilled the value of academics. This may have been a struggle with Wallace in the beginning because his elementary school years were not without problems.

Wallace's teachers were concerned about him all through elementary school. His fourth grade teacher commented in his school records, "Wallace gets involved with students and doesn't control his behavior!" His fifth grade teacher noted, "Wallace works hard when positive behavior is present. When he is upset, his work suffers. He needs to control his temper." His sixth grade teacher noted, "Wallace's attitude socially and academically is inconsistent. He requires much supervision because he is far too interested in his neighbors." Teachers knew that Wallace had the ability. Achievement tests reflected this; Wallace scored in the 88th percentile in reading and math and 86th percentile in language arts. In fifth grade, Wallace was recommended for the gifted and talented program, but chose not to join the self-contained G/T class, because he did not want to leave his friends. In seventh grade, teachers continued to recognize the high potential in the young man and recommended him for a two-year enrichment program, which provided high potential students from inner-city environments with field trips and specialized training with professional architects. Through this exposure to creative individuals, Wallace gained a great deal of confidence and pointed out that many skills he used in his current coursework had been developed through this program.

The high potential and strong ability were recognized again in high school when Wallace was chosen for the Upward Bound Program. He participated in Upward Bound's six-week summer program at a private college in Centerfield and he continued to benefit from the support systems provided by the program throughout the scholastic year. Wallace the athlete was also Wallace the newspaper columnist, who contributed articles regularly to the *Centerfield Gazette's* "Student Page," and Wallace the scientist, who won a second place prize with two partners in the city-wide Science Fair competition. Wallace's program at South Central was a combination of honors and academic classes and he was achieving a B average.

Wallace had earned the respect of his peers as the entire student body recognized that this young man was someone they'd be reading about after he left South Central High School. This soft-spoken, articulate young gentleman who was popular with his peers and served them as their Student Council President, initially had aspirations of attending Clemson University, playing football, and eventually becoming a public relations expert. These aspirations changed, however as Wallace began to consider the impact of athletics on many college athletes. He decided instead to accept a scholarship to a small private liberal arts college with an excellent academic reputation.

Chico

When Chico's guidance counselor informed him that she had nominated him for a research study and he would be meeting with researchers from The University of Connecticut, he rolled his eyes and said in exasperation, "Why in the world did you go do a foolish thing like that?" He arrived at his guidance counselor's office and stood slouched in the doorway. He checked the researcher from the The University of Connecticut over from head to toe and asked, "Are you a professor?" While shaking hands, Chico continued to eye this stranger suspiciously. Not knowing what to make of the situation, he agreed to participate in the study.

The counselor had described him as the "most handsome Puerto Rican male in this high school." Chico was dressed in baggy jeans which hung very low at the waist, exposing the top part of his white boxer shorts. He wore a black crew neck jersey and a gold chain necklace. His outfit was rounded off with a pair of black leather laced boots which reached his mid-calf. He wore the boots half unlaced following the latest style established by the high school's fashion conscious Hispanic population. Chico was indeed a handsome teenager. His short jet black hair was covered by a baseball cap which he wore backwards. His high cheekbones and perfect skin were accentuated by his full jet black mustache and goatee which he kept immaculately groomed. He appeared cool at all times. He cruised the school grounds with a lollipop stick jutting from his mouth in a Telly Savalas style, and he could be seen charming the young female students he met throughout his travels.

Chico was the youngest child in his family. He had seven older brothers and three older sisters, all from his mother's previous marriage. Only one older half-brother, who had left the Marines and undergone drug rehabilitation, was currently unemployed and lived at home with Chico and his parents. One half-sister was living in Puerto Rico. The remainder of Chico's half-brothers and sisters lived in Centerfield or neighboring East Centerfield. Chico explained the family got together every week to watch Sunday afternoon football games on TV, and his mother enjoyed cooking for all of them. Angel, one of Chico's half-brothers, was attending a branch of the state university. Another older half-brother had attended college on a soccer scholarship, graduated with a degree in business administration and had a high paying position with the *Centerfield Gazette*. Chico explained, "He's the smartest in the family and he's moving up fast!" Chico described Ramon, another half-brother who was serving in the Air Force as someone he admired. He explained why:

> He's cool. He understands. He understands what I go through on the streets. He's been through it, too. Some of my other brothers lecture me and I don't like it. They say, "Don't mess up in school. Don't start selling drugs. Don't join a gang. Don't do this. Don't do that!" Ramon will tell me the same things, but he won't lecture. He'll say, "I went through the same things. I know how it was."

Several of the older half-siblings were married and had children of their own. Chico's mother took care of the grandchildren during the day, having received a license from the state to operate a children's day care in her home. Chico explained, "the state pays for

it." Chico's father was employed in an auto parts store in East Centerfield. In an interview with Chico's parents, they explained the marriage had not been happy. Chico's father had been asked to leave the home and had just recently been living at home again, following a car accident in which he had injured his back and been hospitalized. His wife had agreed to take care of him during his recuperation. Chico's mother was quick to point out that her husband slept in a bedroom down the hall. Chico's parents had moved to Centerfield from Bayamon, Puerto Rico in search of employment opportunities. His father worked in the tobacco fields when he first arrived in this state. He taught himself English after a friendly landlord gave him his first dictionary. Chico's mother admitted that she had not done as well learning the language. She spoke only Spanish and pointed out that this handicap prevented her from venturing out into the Centerfield community often. She stayed close to her neighborhood and explained that she enjoyed shopping only in the Hispanic, family-operated stores on Oak Street in Centerfield since she could communicate easily with the shopkeepers. Chico's mother planned to return to Puerto Rico after Chico had graduated from college.

Chico's home was a modest dwelling situated in the projects on the south end of Centerfield. His parents were proud of their place which was small and cramped with furniture, but immaculate. Chico explained that he did not hang out in his neighborhood often. In this federally funded housing area, he thought the police were constantly harassing teenagers in the neighborhood. He explained:

> Around here, the cops were always messin' with you. You can't hang out and have a good time without the cops stopping you and harassing you. I was in a car with my brothers and we got stopped because we looked suspicious.

Chico also believed that too many fights broke out in his neighborhood, and he described a drive-by shooting that had happened over the weekend in which a car was riddled with bullets from an uzi as a warning from one street gang to another.

Chico was born at St. Xavier Hospital in Centerfield and was a Head Start student at The Sacred Heart School as a young child. He attended elementary school and junior high in Centerfield's public schools. Growing up in a home where only Spanish was spoken, he was placed in the bilingual program in kindergarten and was mainstreamed into a regular program following third grade. His elementary school teachers described him as an "excellent student in all areas" and "a well-behaved quiet boy." His fourth grade teacher pointed out that Chico "was a fine citizen and well-liked by his peers." His elementary school progress reports were superior, and his junior high transcript included a grade record of Bs and Cs. By the time Chico arrived at South Central High School as a freshman, the picture changed. He was enrolled in strictly academic classes in ninth grade. He failed all of his ninth grade classes, with the exception of physical education. Following this dismal year, he was dropped to general level classes. His high school portfolio was filled with warning notices from teachers which continually indicated a problem with tardiness, absences, lack of completed assignments, and occasional disruptive behavior in class. Chico explained his behavior when he commented, "I just mess around a lot. I just joke around. I talk with the other guys. I'm getting on my teachers' nerves." One teacher had noted, "Chico has a lot of growing up to do. Right now, he does not belong in an academic setting." Throughout the academic warnings, teachers noted his high ability and his active participation in lively class discussions. His math teacher commented to his guidance counselor, "He wants to look to the streets, but he's too smart for that. He's the smartest kid in the room." The math teacher had unsuccessfully attempted to recruit Chico for the school math team.

This bright young math whiz had scored in the 90th percentiles in math as well as in reading throughout elementary and junior high school achievement testing. He explained he enjoyed math and hoped to pursue a degree in business administration following his service in the U.S. Marines. Chico dreamed of owning his own business, "but not a grocery store!," and raising a family "of about three kids."

Rosa

Rosa was an energetic, attractive young woman who spoke quickly and had a difficult time sitting still. She was a study in constant motion and it was immediately clear that she had a purpose in life. She was the oldest of two daughters and a son born to a mother who was a dietary aide and a father who worked in a factory, but was unemployed during most of the data gathering period of this study. Her mother, who was born in Puerto Rico, did not graduate from high school. Her father, who was Peruvian, completed high school and took a few college courses. Rosa was influenced by the recent illness of her younger sister who was recovering from cancer. This experience caused Rosa to decide to be a doctor and strengthened her resolve to do well in school.

Her work load at her high school was very heavy as she took all advanced courses and was very active in school. She was currently sixth in her class and had excelled in both academic and extracurricular activities since she entered school as a young girl. Comments made by teachers such as "My best student" and "highly motivated" and "best student in the school" can be found throughout her entire academic record beginning in kindergarten. During her senior year, Rosa received all As in Honors French 4, Honors Pre-Calculus, Honors Anthropology, Honors Composition, and Advanced Placement Biology. She was the editor of the yearbook, the captain of the soccer team, as well as a member of the National Honor Society, and the French and Russian Clubs. The Russian Club took a trip to Moscow and St. Petersburg for three weeks in the spring of her senior year. She also worked approximately 15 hours a week in the kitchen at the same health care facility in which her mother worked. She applied to Yale, Boston College, Wesleyan, and Brown during her senior year and will attend Brown on a full scholarship.

Rosa loved art and credited her mother's artistic ability as being the reason for her own talent in art. Rosa indicated that her parents did not pressure her to get top grades or to participate in all of the activities in which she took part. Rather, her parents encouraged her to do her best in all of her endeavors. She experienced various types of prejudice in the community and occasionally in academic experiences. She believed she had experienced prejudice because she was both smart and Puerto Rican. "I know that people will occasionally look at me and say, when they find out that I'm smart, 'How can that be? She's Puerto Rican.'" This happened to her outside of Centerfield in the summer programs in which she participated for high achieving students which were held at some of the most prestigious private schools in the state.

She often spent five hours a night on homework and described herself as a hard worker. She participated in an elementary school gifted and talented program and many special programs within the state. She acknowledged the help and encouragement of some of her elementary and high school teachers and also indicated that she sometimes hid from her high school guidance counselor who was looking for her to fill out something for a special program, award, or scholarship. She also said that her guidance counselor, who was of Puerto Rican descent, would occasionally see her in the hallway with a male friend and 'go ballistic' because he was so afraid that she was involved with a boy. Rosa, however, did not date at all until her junior year and then she chose a boyfriend who was away at college, explaining that for a talented Puerto Rican woman to date would mean she would have to put her hopes and dreams on hold and pay attention to the male. "I just want to do my thing

first, boys were another thing, and my thing comes first." She smiled after making that comment and said, "Me first, that could be the name of a club for girls who want to achieve, couldn't it?"

Her parents did not socialize a great deal with other Hispanic families or relatives in the Centerfield community because of their perception of pressure to conform to values that they did not adhere to in their home. Rosa had friends of all backgrounds including one Puerto Rican girl who had been her best friend for many years and who provided support and a constant source of encouragement. This was a reciprocal relationship as Rosa continued to encourage her friend. Rosa believed that the honors and Advanced Placement classes that she took in her high school were an instrumental part of her success in school and also credited her friends and the peer group that attended classes together. In fact, the peer group of achievers in which Rosa was involved stayed together in their honors classes and many of their extracurricular activities including clubs, summer programs, and sports.

Yvellise

Brick-red framed, slightly tinted eyeglasses camouflaged Yvellise's light-brown, shiny eyes, but complemented her sand skin tone. Wearing little make-up of a peach shade, gold loop earrings which stood out from her long chestnut hair, a long sleeved yellow silk blouse, dark blue jeans, brown suede shoes, and manicured long nails, she smiled shyly and spoke in a soft voice that indicated a kind personality.

Yvellise lived with her parents and two older sisters having moved several times between the States and Puerto Rico. Her family had lived in Centerfield since 1991. Her mother was a housewife who was experiencing a difficult time because one of her brothers was hospitalized with AIDS. Her father owned an auto parts store in Centerfield in partnership with a brother-in-law. Yvellise's oldest sister was twenty-five years old and planned to attend college in the near future. Her older sister was twenty-two years old and was currently attending a state college majoring in psychology. Yvellise was more comfortable with this twenty-two year old sister because they shared similar interests.

At the age of eight, when Yvellise first arrived in the United States, her parents immediately enrolled her in third grade where Yvellise was placed in a bilingual program. The transition was not easy for Yvellise but her fifth grade teachers described her as "a nice girl" who "likes to work hard" and "very motivated regarding school work," but still "could do better work." Her fifth grade report card indicated Bs and Cs and a teacher's note: "Yvellise puede mejorar sus notas ya que tiene el potencial y no lo está usando al máximo." (Yvellise could improve her grades because she has the potential, but she is not using it to the maximum.) Then, her family returned to Puerto Rico. Two years later, Yvellise's family returned again to the United States. This time, Yvellise began eighth grade and was again enrolled in a bilingual program. Her school performance was excellent as evidenced by mostly As on her report card. Teachers depicted Yvellise as a "top student" who did "outstanding work" and had "mature, excellent behavior." Other comments included, "Her English has really improved," and "I enjoy having her in class." In her cumulative record, the following note appeared: "She was a very bright student, mature, well-behaved, and developed an excellent command of English. She had high potential."

Currently, Yvellise was in ninth grade at South Central High School. Regarding her own academic performance, Yvellise stated:

> I don't have the grades that I used to have. I want to do better, but I don't know . . . . I don't like coming to school, but I have to. I am not doing as good as I should. I

> can get Bs and Cs without studying and As if I really work hard. I can pass without studying hard.

Her report card displayed Bs and Cs. Her counselor expressed his concern about Yvellise's academic performance as follows:

> I know she is a bright girl and I don't want to see her wasting her potential as many other students [do] in this school. I want to prevent major problems. She has the potential to do excellent in mathematics; but although she was not failing the class, she was getting Cs. One of her teachers says that she was "too easily satisfied."

Although Yvellise displayed a high potential for mathematics, her opinion about her abilities was exactly the opposite. She explained, "I don't like mathematics at all. I am not good at it." Yvellise planned to graduate from high school and to attend college. She wanted to major in business administration or communications. She envisioned herself with a good career, "a high rank job position, a nice house, a nice car, two or three kids, and married for a long time."

Results

The findings discussed in this executive summary are divided into two sections. The first involves the factors influencing achievement which comprised the core category for the group of high ability achievers in this study. The second set of findings are the factors influencing underachievement which comprised the core categories that evolved from the high ability cross-cultural underachievers.

Factors Influencing Achievement

The factors identified through data analysis on all 35 participants as influencing their achievement in high school are listed. It should be noted all participants, regardless of gender and cultural group, identified these factors as contributing to their academic success; however, the factors varied in the level of importance by gender and cultural group.

Factors Influencing the Achievement of High Ability Students

- Belief in self
- Personal characteristics
- Support systems
- Participation in special programs, extracurricular activities, and summer enrichment programs
- Appropriately challenging classes
- Realistic aspirations

Belief in Self

The development of a strong belief in self was evident in all achieving participants. The oldest participants in the study exhibited the strongest belief in themselves, possibly indicating that this belief may develop over time and because of various circumstances and experiences. The younger students in this study (freshmen and sophomores) were confident about their ability to succeed, but the juniors and seniors exhibited stronger beliefs about who they were, what they wanted to achieve in life, and the direction they needed take to realize their goals. This sense of self developed despite the urban

environment which resulted in negative circumstances including economic struggles and poverty, the pervasive availability of drugs, gang and community violence, and family or peer group problems.

According to the participants in the study, this strong belief in self was due to several factors or influences including: supportive adults, extracurricular activities, appropriate educational opportunities, family support, peer support, and the various personal characteristics including sensitivity, multicultural appreciation, realistic aspirations, motivation, and resilience.

Personal Characteristics

A number of common personal characteristics were demonstrated by the participants in this study including: motivation and inner will, positive use of problem solving, independence, realistic aspirations, heightened sensitivity to each other and the world around them, independence, and appreciation of cultural diversity. Numerous examples of these characteristics were consistently noted in this study.

The participants in this study displayed a sensitivity to situations, people, places, and the difficulties of urban life. The males, in particular, exhibited a heightened sensitivity that was similar to the sensitivity openly displayed by the females in this study. Their belief in self appeared to involve a sentimental, intuitive, and caring quality about them and they did not follow the traditional cultural patterns dictated by a macho society.

Vaughn, the senior member of the men's swim team, was appreciated by his peers for his sensitivity. His friend Mary reported that he had a reputation for watching out for the freshman members of the team for he enjoyed the role of "big brother" to the younger athletes. In his senior résumé where he listed his strengths, he wrote:

> Over the years, I've noticed my friends appreciating my understanding, willingness to listen, and trustworthiness. When it comes to talking to me about a sensitive topic, people feel very comfortable. This is the quality I am most proud of.

The sensitivity and strong belief in self was evident when Vaughn elaborated on this personal quality. He explained that many of his peers, including the young women in his classes, took their personal problems to "Uncle Vaughn." He seemed proud to report that he was always there to listen to friends share their concerns about alcoholic parents, sibling rivalries, or personal family crises. Vaughn, the good listener and sensitive friend to all who knew him, also pointed out that this quality was something he looked for in good teachers. He thought the teachers who motivated him were those who showed an interest in their students personally and treated them like people.

Jana, who was Puerto Rican and had participated in bilingual programs, was extremely determined to be independent. She said she did not want to be like her mother who had given birth to three children with three different fathers, two of whom she had not married. Jana said although she loved her mother, she did not want to be like her. When asked if she considered herself different she said, "Yes" and explained, "I just don't want to be like everybody else—just hanging around. I want to make something of myself."

She also said that she would not date for the same reason. Having seen many Hispanic men who want to be "in control of everything," Jana explained her decision not to date, "because I'm just not going to let myself be told what to do or anything by anyone, especially a man."

A determination to succeed was consistently echoed by most of the participants in this study, especially the female achievers. Marisa explained that her parents helped instill her determination to succeed:

> I want to be the best. My parents caused this to happen, I think that the parents instill that. It has to be done so when you're growing up, how you're raised. They're always, "You have to be the best. The best. The best." So that stayed with me and I just want to be the best.

When asked if this caused her to feel any pressure, Marisa responded:

> Depending on how much there is. You need the pressure to grow up. You need that pressure. It's a good kind of pressure, but if it gets like too much like, "You have to get this grade," or "If you don't, then you're going to get in trouble." That's going too far, but you still need that pressure.

Participants acknowledged that appreciation for cultural diversity was an integral part of the strong belief in self they had. All of these young people mentioned the pride they had in the culturally diverse population of their high school and how their appreciation for diversity helped them become better adults.

The high achieving participants in this study referred to an internal motivation that kept them driven to succeed in their urban environment. One participant referred to this drive as an "inner will" and this inner will was an important aspect of the strong belief in self observed in the young men. The participant explained his theory or "inner will" and its importance in his achievement:

> It sounds off the wall, but it's an internal will. For example, if I am curious about something and I want to learn about it, like my science fair topic—cold fusion. I didn't care if the material I needed was radioactive or not. I said to the professor, "Send it to me in a lead bottle UPS. I'll pay the shipping!" Nothing is going to stop me. I am going to do this experiment. If I get this inner drive pointed towards academics, I'll do well. That's basically it. It's like a driving force. If I find some reason to motivate myself to push for something, I'll do it.

The majority of the high achieving participants in this study clearly revealed their resilience to overcome problems associated with their families, their school, and their environment. Most of the achievers involved in this study came from homes which had been affected by poverty, family turmoil caused by issues such as alcohol, drugs, and mental illness, and other problems. As one participant indicated, "My family story is filled with eyebrow raisers." Other achievers had relatively calm and peaceful homes. All participants, however, lived in a city that is plagued by violence, drugs, poverty, and crime. Their school district is often called one of the worst in the country and privatization of schools within the city has been considered by the Board of Education.

The young people profiled in this study survived in the city and excelled in their school. They ignored drug dealers, they turned their backs on gangs, they avoided the crime in their neighborhoods, and they went on to become valedictorians, class presidents, star athletes, and scholars. Some went to Ivy League Schools, some attended the most selective colleges in the country, and all wanted to make a contribution to their world. The courage and resilience displayed by these young people seemed remarkable and yet, they simply accepted their circumstances and appreciated the opportunities given to them. Nicki's family problems might have seemed overwhelming to some young people as they included persistent family financial problems, her father's constant battle with alcoholism, her parents'

divorce, her mother's bitterness, and her own alienation from her family and friends because of her constant need to achieve. Yet, instead of turning to drugs or giving up, she examined her life through her writing, winning a $10,000 scholarship from a large insurance company for an essay submitted to a writing competition. Her essay, entitled *The Stranger*, detailed her troubled relationship with her father and her eventual understanding of his love for her.

Support Systems

Various networks existed to support the achievement of these students, including peers who also were high achieving students, family members, supportive teachers in previous years, and other adults.

It became clear very early in the study that a support system was created within the school to help the participants in this study succeed academically. This support system consisted of the students who wanted to succeed academically and were willing and able to work to achieve this goal, and various teachers, coaches, counselors, and administrators. This network was absolutely essential to the academic success of most of the achieving participants in this study, and all participants acknowledged its existence in a variety of ways. As students became older, the network became stronger as various extracurricular involvement occurred or intensified. These extracurricular activities included clubs, organizations like the National Honor Society, and experiences such as summer programs at private schools, Upward Bound, and special ceremonies at various universities. The network of high achieving peers supported the experiences. For example, the guidance counselors began to realize which students had the ability and desire to succeed academically and provided the opportunities for students (to be together in classes and summer experiences) who had the greatest likelihood of succeeding. It was at this point in their high school experience that the greatest gap emerged between high ability students who achieve and underachieve.

When interviewed, some of the counselors in this study were shocked to learn of the high scores of the underachieving students who were also involved in the study. Because of the large student load assigned to each guidance counselor, counselors usually indicated that they had to spend the majority of their time dealing with students with problems. It was a common occurrence to see police and drug enforcement officials, social workers, angry parents, and community members in the guidance counselors' offices. So much time was spent on this population and so little success achieved, that some guidance counselors indicated that they considered the encouragement of high achieving students both a responsibility and one of the few successes they experienced in their work. One guidance counselor, upon hearing of Rosa's acceptance and full scholarship to Brown University, hugged one of the researchers involved in the study and said, "This is the joy of my work!" This sentiment was also expressed in interviews with other teachers and administrators who believed that achieving students received "the short end of the stick" because so much time and attention had been and continued to be spent on students with academic, social, emotional, and behavioral problems.

Most of the achieving participants in this study appeared to have supportive families that nurtured them in a variety of ways. Some participants had extremely supportive families while other participants' families provided minimal emotional support because of their need to strive for economic survival. It was interesting to find that all subjects perceived that their parents regarded school and learning as very important as a way to improve their situation in life, but that in almost every case, the parents of these young people had minimal involvement in their high school experience. They rarely, if ever, came to the school and were not active in school activities or projects. Participants in this study cited numerous examples of how their parents were actively involved in elementary school

but as students entered their secondary school years, parental involvement shifted. Parents would occasionally ask, "Did you finish your homework?" However, little attention was paid to either the content or process of learning by the parents of these young people.

All of the participants in this study indicated that the guidance of supportive adults was essential to their academic success. They all cited teachers at the elementary or junior high school level who had been influential in their school lives and who had an impact upon their current success.

Along with supportive elementary and middle school teachers who inspired many of the young achievers were teachers or other adults at South Central High School who continued to provide support and helped to strengthen their strong belief in self. An interesting finding in the study was that the better teachers (who were mentioned by the students) were described as people who cared and helped. Very few of the teachers who were mentioned were noted for curricular reasons. The participants appreciated teachers who challenged them intellectually, yet the majority of the teachers discussed were regarded as supportive adults who nurtured their belief in self, their motivation, and their overall well-being as young adults.

Mrs. Lowell, the freshman English teacher, was mentioned by more students interviewed in the study than any other faculty member at South Central High School. Throughout their descriptions of the woman and her style of teaching were signs that the woman was reaching out to these young people in such a way that they knew she cared about them. One participant described her class:

> Mrs. Lowell taught with a lot of enthusiasm. She told us on the first day of class that we were never leaving the room. "This is not a democracy!" she said. "Whatever you need from the nurse, I have right here. You gotta' get sick, there is the trash can. You want a drink of water. I have bottled water." She *had* bottled water! "People come in from the rain some days and your hair is all wet, I have a blow dryer." She really did and she let people use it. She had people keep their jackets in her teacher's closet. She was a real good teacher. I loved her from the first day. It was a really good class. She was my best teacher. She was at every football game. You know who your true fans are. When you are winning, everybody is there, but when you are losing, only your real fans are there. She was there at every game. I connected with her from the start.

Several participants described lessons they learned through a supportive relationship with their coaches. Wallace described a football game where South Central was defeating a rival by a wide margin and the coach allowed the second string players some time to play. Wallace said:

> He took the varsity out. It was a different learning experience. We wanted to blow them out of the water because of all of those years when they would step over us when we were 1-15. Waterville tried to score 70 points on us in one game. They kept running up the score. Our coaches were upset but there was to be no revenge. Another time, after the Winslow game, we had them by 50 at half-time, and he didn't let any of the varsity players play during the second half. It was a learning experience for us. He taught us that once you get a person down, why beat them and beat them?

Participation in Special Programs, Extracurricular Activities, and Summer Enrichment Programs

The student parking lot at South Central High often appeared deserted directly after the school buses pulled away at 2:15 p.m.; however, inside the school, another day began for some students. Within the walls of the high school, dedicated groups of students remained until early evening hours. Football players reported to the gymnasium to lift weights, swimmers dove into the pool and began their daily practice, National Honor Society members met in a classroom to discuss their upcoming service project, and student council members met again to discuss a new idea to stimulate an apathetic student body.

All participants in this study were involved in these activities that were held both during and usually after school hours. Almost all of the achieving students in this study remained in their high school after school to participate in a wide variety of activities on a daily basis. Many of the participants were involved in more than one sport and all were involved in numerous school clubs and activities, including jazz band, foreign language clubs, service groups, and academic competitions.

These extracurricular activities and programs appeared to have a major impact on these young people and were consistently cited as being extremely influential in the development of their ability to excel academically.

Appropriately Challenging Classes

Another major factor that students attributed to their successful academic achievement was their involvement in honors classes. When they entered their high school as freshmen, they were assigned to honors classes because of their previous high grades and their level of hard work. The counselors created one or two honors classes in each academic content area and students who were high achievers could enroll in the class. Students who were involved in this study were consistently grateful for the opportunity to take these classes and be grouped with other students who wanted to be involved in the classes and who wanted to work and to learn. After the seniors who were in this study completed their sophomore year, a vice principal who was committed to "detracking the school" convinced the school administration to open up the honors classes to anyone who wanted to take them. Most of the achieving students in this study voiced their beliefs about the importance of honors classes and their ambivalence about the changes they had encountered with the change in policy. One explained:

> With respect to not having honors/academic classes mixed, I don't think that would work. I mean . . . our vice principal here used to talk about that. How he liked that because you would have the honors students helping the remedial. I don't like that idea only because I think we'd go back to the elementary days where the classes cater to the lower people and everybody else just kind of sits there. I personally wouldn't like that because I feel like I wouldn't be getting anywhere.

Realistic Aspirations

The aspirations of the young people who achieved at South Central High were closely tied to their strong belief in self. They all expressed a desire to graduate from college and pursue a professional career, with a clear sense of what they wanted to do in life. They had dreams and definite goals towards which they were striving and these dreams, goals, and career aspirations were closely connected with who they were as people. Their personalities were often reflected in their choices for the future. Gender differences emerged relative to the aspirations of the achievers in this study. All of the young women in

the study wanted to enter "helping" careers, usually considered "female" professions such as teaching, social work, or medicine.

Factors Influencing Underachievement

The core categories which emerged across cultures from the high ability underachievers in this study included school factors, family issues, community factors, and personal factors which affect underachievement.

School Factors

The high ability underachievers in the study consistently indicated that they had experienced a high school program which was quite different from the one described by the achieving population. The six major factors which were found to influence the academic underachievement of these high ability young students are listed and discussed with representative quotations from the participants.

School Factors Influencing the Academic Underachievement of High Ability Students

- Inappropriate early curricular experiences
- Absence of opportunities to develop appropriate school work habits
- Negative interactions with teachers
- Absence of challenge in high school
- Questionable counseling experiences

Inappropriate Early Curricular Experiences

Underachieving students believed that their elementary and middle school experiences had been too easy, which had a direct impact on their later school experiences. Those young people who were not successful faced daily curricular experiences which were inappropriate for them. The elementary academic experiences of the participants who underachieved in school played a dramatic role in the emergence and development of their underachievement in high school. Most of the high ability underachievers believed that their elementary school academic experiences were not challenging enough. Their classes and academic tasks were often "too easy," and participants recalled "breezing" through elementary school, and indicated that schoolwork required no major effort. School work was so simple that students did not acquire appropriate opportunities to develop important academic skills or sophisticated study skills. Both students' school work habits and self-discipline, in their classrooms and at home, were not properly developed, according to the data gathered in this study. Teachers provided students with regular curricular experiences and educational pacing within the regular classroom that seemed to inhibit students' development of their high abilities. Students did not have early access to appropriate educational services within the regular classroom or in gifted programs. These students often had limited access to challenging learning experiences that foster the skills and discipline required for higher intellectual pursuits later in their academic life.

Absence of Opportunities to Develop Appropriate School Work Habits

During upper elementary, middle, and high school, participants started facing new situations that required different or more efficient study skills. Consequently, opportunities to acquire new study skills and/or to improve students' school work habits were necessary. Unfortunately, participants did not receive direct assistance in this respect. These young people reported that no opportunities to develop or to improve their work habits and self-discipline were provided in their school experiences. They believed that the schools and/or teachers assumed that work habits were already developed, and that it was, therefore, not the

schools' and/or teachers' responsibility to provide students with opportunities to develop their working habits.

Negative Interactions With Teachers

Teachers became critical sources of support for the students' learning in high school and if teachers were not considered to be caring and concerned, underachievement was exacerbated. Participants who underachieved believe that although they met "good" teachers during their secondary school experiences, most of their content area teachers were less caring and supportive than those they had encountered during elementary school.

Absence of Challenge in High School

All of the underachievers reported that they also began underachieving if an unrewarding, unchallenging curriculum provoked boredom in their classes. Milton reported being bored in his art class. As a result, he chose to "do nothing" in class except "mess around" and "talk to other guys." Milton also mentioned being bored in his math class and explained, "I don't do no work. I just sit in his classroom and have conversations and laugh. I don't pay attention." Other participants also believed that an obvious mismatch existed between their curricular strengths and the classes they were enrolled in and that their special talents or strengths often were ignored.

Questionable Counseling Experiences

Inappropriate counseling experiences existed for the underachieving students as evidenced by their strengths being overlooked, their negative curricular experiences, and the problems they faced with their guidance counselors. These counseling experiences often thwarted students' paths to success. The majority of the students who underachieved expressed dissatisfaction with the nature of some of their interactions with their counselors.

For example, John's counseling experiences at South Central were not positive. He explained that he had failed U.S. History and had to repeat the course. Class schedules were completed in September by his guidance counselor and Mrs. D'Agostino, the principal, who assisted the counselors due to an understaffed department. He said:

> They were supposed to place me in an academic class because that's what I had before. Mrs. D'Agostino and my counselor were doing the scheduling. They put me in a basic level class. Mrs. D'Agostino told me that she was going to ask the teacher to give me extra work. She never said anything to him and I never told him! It is very boring. The kids in there have learning problems. It's just too simple. It's sixth grade work to me! You read a paragraph and answer a question. Six or seven questions at the end of a chapter. You have to read it and then they tell you the answer.

John found these classes almost comical. He believed that he had received inappropriate advice in selecting his courses because the work was too easy.

Family Issues

A second participant category which emerged from the data was a series of family issues that negatively affected the lives of the high ability underachievers. The family issues are listed.

Family Issues Which Affected Academic Underachievement

- Family dysfunction
- Strained relations with family members

- Problems with siblings and sibling rivalry
- Inconsistent role models and value systems in the family
- Minimal parental academic monitoring, guidance, and expectations

Family Dysfunction

Family dysfunction appeared to influence the underachievement of several participants involved in the study. Participants stated that stressful events such as the serious illness of a family member or relative, a handicapped sibling and/or a change in the family structure negatively influenced their home atmosphere which, in turn, influenced their moods, attitudes, and achievement in school. The stress often resulted in a difficult time for all family members.

Strained Relations With Family Members

According to data gathered in this study, the participants' confrontations with parents occurred because of incongruent points of view regarding cultural values and age-related (adolescent) issues. Conflicting points of view between students and parents were specifically noted in relation to Puerto Rican traditional cultural values regarding interdependence/independence and "respeto" (respect) towards parental authority.

Sandra experienced uneasy family situations which negatively affected the climate of her home. Sandra's mother was diagnosed as "clinically depressed," a condition that affected her mother's emotional stability and availability to her children. Sandra summarized her feelings about her mother by explaining, "My mother is a little cuckoo. So sometimes I just play dumb. Sometimes, I just go to sleep." In spite of this depression, Sandra's parents decided to adopt a child. This decision had disastrous results. Sandra admitted that the onerous process of adopting a little boy, complicated by her mother's unstable emotional condition, negatively influenced her family unity. Sandra's emotional state was disrupted, and she believed this prevented her from engaging in meaningful learning experiences at school. Sandra explained:

> My family wanted to adopt somebody. They [Family and Child Services] told my mother, "There's a little boy. He's in a foster family right now. His case is in court. There's a good chance that the mother will lose and he's up for adoption." . . . Finally he was moved into my house, but his mother won the court case. So she was given custody of him. He was taken away from us and that totally destroyed the whole family togetherness. My mother and father were destroyed, and I was too.

Problems With Siblings and Sibling Rivalry

In addition to conflicting relationships, tense relationships with siblings negatively influenced students' disposition to learn. Some participants had a brother or sister who had been an academic "superstar" in school. In order to avoid competing, the participants in this study stopped trying and consciously began to underachieve in school. Participants reported that discord with their siblings arose in relation to issues such as the use of the phone, the volume of the radio, unasked advice, and disappointment about family problems. The following statement illustrates the sibling difficulties experienced by some participants:

> Last year, I used to leave the house because my brother used to beat me. He even tried to choke me a couple of times. Like because I was on the phone for too long or because the music was too loud.

Inconsistent Role Models and Value Systems in the Family

Jana was classified as an achiever in this study and yet her experiences were indicative of the sometimes blurry distinction between achievement and underachievement.

Several times during the course of this study, Jana seemed poised to waiver between achievement and underachievement. She readily agreed that her female peer network was the major factor that kept her in a pattern of achievement. Her mother's role modeling also was a motivating factor. Jana's mother had three children who each had a different father. Her only marriage had ended in divorce and financial problems plagued the family as her mother often worked ten or twelve hours a day to pay the bills. Many of the high achieving young people in this study faced difficult problems and for some, life was a daily struggle. Most of the underachieving students faced similar problems, yet they were not able to overcome these problems and succeed in school. For example, Ivy's mother had been investigated for beating her daughter who had moved in with her grandparents. Some of the other underachieving students had severe family problems, which seemed to contribute to their underachievement. Others faced what the majority of the participants in this study faced: poverty, problems with parents or siblings, low parental expectations, and little guidance or academic support.

Minimal Parental Academic Monitoring, Guidance, and Expectations

Participants in this study were aware of their parents' efforts to help in ways they could. Students recognized their parents' interest in having them "do good in school" and to "do better" than their parents. Parents tried to encourage their children to succeed in school and life by using their own life experiences as examples to prevent their children from "making the same mistakes." Yet, parental help was frequently of limited quantity and quality. Sandra explained:

> My parents have always told me to do my work. They are always after me, "Do your work. Did you do your homework?" My mother doesn't know English. Well, she knows English, but she never went past fourth grade education. So I can't ask her for help. And my father, he is always working. I can't ask them for help. I have always had to do my work all by myself.

However, parents did not get actively involved in the school work required in high school. These parents expected their children to do their homework by themselves. As a result, doing homework was a decision left up to the student. On the other hand, students reported that they spent a good deal of time at home just watching TV, talking on the phone, listening to music, or playing Nintendo.

Community Factors

In addition to numerous family problems, the underachievers faced the same types of community problems as did the achieving students, but somehow while the achievers were able to use their resilience to overcome problems, the students who underachieved were more susceptible to issues caused by community problems which included the areas listed.

Community Factors Influencing Academic Achievement

- Negative school environment
- Hostile urban environment (ethnic prejudice, limited opportunities for constructive entertainment)
- Inappropriate peer group issues

Negative School Environment

The negative environment was evidenced in a variety of ways and influenced how many bright young people became discouraged with their efforts to strive for success at South Central High School. In a conversation with a guidance counselor about the length

of an academic awards assembly, the counselor explained that the guidance staff had to keep the assembly limited to one hour since the faculty would be "looking at their watches."

Hostile Urban Environment

Participants discussed the hostile environment, the influence of the surrounding community, and its influence on their personal life and school performance. The local community was plagued with gang-related conflicts, prejudice, and limited opportunities for entertainment. Consequently, students felt unsafe, bored, and uncomfortable with their social life conditions.

Centerfield was plagued by increasing gang-related incidents which involved fights and crime activities such as drug dealing and homicides. These gangs ran their own drug cartels, and offered young people from poor neighborhoods an opportunity for making money. Gang membership provided an alternative means for economic advancement. In addition to access to better economic conditions, gang membership involved emotional support. After a trial period, gang members counted on the protection of their fellow members. Although none of the participants in this study was an actual active member of these gangs, they were all cognizant of the situation. They believed that the common fights and drug dealing in and out of the school, as well as the killing in their neighborhoods, had a negative impact on them. The latest killing of young gang members incited a sense of despair in these students. Participants felt threatened, scared, and unsafe.

Another issue experienced by participants who underachieved was ethnic prejudice by other citizens and/or institutions. Milton experienced unpleasant encounters with people who have denigrated him. He explained:

> People think they are better than you. I was with my friends in McDonald's. A McDonald's in a nearby city. And there were people in there, and they were calling us "Spics." They wanted us to leave. There were some dudes in there, and stuff, and they were a lot bigger than us, so we didn't fight. We left. I was embarrassed that people were calling me a "Spic." A "Spic" is like calling a Black person a "nigger."

He also claimed that racism still exists, and that he can see it.

> They look at you wrong just because I have two earrings on my ear, and/or I wear a hood. That doesn't mean I'm on drugs, or I'm going to kill somebody, or I'm going to rob a bank or something.

Milton was also confused about the idea of being a "minority," and he explained:

> Why do we have to be minorities? Why can't we be like White people? We're minorities because they make us minorities and because we're ignorant enough to take what they tell us, and do it. I don't like it.

He further discussed his problem in relation to school. "Most Puerto Ricans and Blacks prefer to go to the streets than go to the school and learn. I'd rather follow their way than having a White teacher telling me what to do." He was confused about being street smart or being a "preppie" in school. He decided to be street smart which he perceived was the best way to get money, gold, nice clothing, and the respect of others. He explained, "It's not complicated. It's a lot easier than going to school. People look up to you. You're going to be a leader. You're not going to be a follower. You won't be like everybody else."

Few opportunities for constructive entertainment was another community factor that participants perceived as affecting their lives. Participants described Centerfield as a dirty, poor, violent, and boring city that offers nothing for young people. With the exception of school sports or clubs, participants believed that there was little for them to do in Centerfield. However, several of the participants who were underachieving were not allowed to participate in school sports because their academic performance was equivalent to less than a C average. Sandra complained that young people cannot find jobs, and without money, they could not "have fun" in Centerfield. Marwin indicated that he dislikes Centerfield, and one way of dealing with this situation is by going to a nearby smaller city every weekend.

Inappropriate Peer Group Issues

The friends selected by the high ability underachievers also seemed to cause problems for some of these bright young people who were having difficulties fulfilling their academic responsibilities. Most of the males in this group faced peer group issues which appeared to negatively influence their attitudes toward academic achievement.

Personal Factors

The high ability underachievers apparently were bored with their curriculum, negatively influenced by their peers and their dismal surroundings, and had few strategies for constructively dealing with these problems. Accordingly, they developed the following personal problems which had an impact on their achievement in school.

Personal Factors Influencing Academic Underachievement

- Behavior problems and disciplinary issues
- Problems with unstructured time
- Confused or unrealistic aspirations
- Insufficient perseverance and low self efficacy
- Inappropriate coping strategies

Behavior Problems and Disciplinary Issues

Many of the young people in this group, particularly males, faced disciplinary problems for their poor behavior in classes and in school. An extensive collection of disciplinary reports was found in their permanent record files. The behavior of several of the students who underachieved in their classes was observed throughout the study, and several of the young men were repeatedly seen with their heads down on a desk either sleeping or hiding under a hooded sweatshirt. Some teachers would allow them to remain that way, while others insisted they sit up and participate in class.

Problems With Unstructured Time

Several of the participants indicated that they had problems with unstructured time. Sandra and Yvellise read and watched television most of the time they were not in school. Yvellise was a soap opera enthusiast who spent hours of each day watching the soaps. Sandra loved novels and read novels by V. C. Andrews and other authors.

Morgan was honest about his poor use of unstructured time. On the morning of his first interview for the study which was being conducted in the media center, he announced:

> I've never been to the media center before. I have never received a pass to come here before. I have never been here during a study hall. I typically go to the pool. I am down there all the time. I meet my girlfriend there. She's on the girls' swim team.

Confused or Unrealistic Aspirations

A majority of the underachieving young people in the study appeared to have aspirations that were either confused or unrealistic. Most seemed out of touch with the reality of their situation. For example, Skip, the high school linebacker who had a dismal record of academic failure and discipline problems, dreamed of attending a New England college "not too far from home" a large enough school where he had a good chance of being recognized by professional recruiters. Perhaps Skip thought that being recognized by a professional football team would solve the problems he currently faced at South Central High.

Insufficient Perseverance and Low Self Efficacy

According to the data gathered in this study, participants had difficulty in persevering as is evident in different aspects of their lives. For example, Sandra reported giving up several things in life. She explained that usually her "interest for something builds up," but then she just "messes around and gives it up." For her, this attitude emerged most often during emotionally stressful times provoked by arguments with her mother, and when she was feeling depressed. "Giving up" was also evident in some school-related interests as well as personal hobbies such as playing the guitar and the flute.

Inappropriate Coping Strategies

In order to protect themselves from negative experiences, students reacted negatively and became defensive towards painful family, school, social, and personal experiences. For instance, Sandra tried to commit suicide because of family conflicts. Milton decided to stop doing his school work, and instead, devoted his energies to making friends. Milton also decided to place more importance on his friends than on his academic performance. Marwin chose to express his unhappiness with school work by displaying disruptive and aggressive behaviors in his classes. Yvellise resisted by spending most of her time reading novels and watching TV.

Summary

In summary, participants in the study who underachieved in school reported that family factors influenced their academic performance. Conflicting family relationships, an unhappy home climate, minimal parental academic guidance and support, as well as inconsistent parental monitoring of students' achievement-oriented activities, and inappropriate parental expectations had a negative impact on the participants' academic achievement.

The schooling experiences of high ability underachievers participating in this investigation also had a negative impact on the expression of their high abilities and their opportunities to reach the highest levels. Based on the data gathered in this study, high ability underachievers were sometimes ignored by administrators, teachers, and counselors who did not understand or encourage them to meet their potential. Administrators, teachers, and counselors were not fully aware of these students' needs, and their schooling, learning, and counseling experiences tended to be inappropriate. Consequently, these students experienced school in ways that jeopardized their chances of succeeding academically. In terms of community factors, the combination of negative social conditions such as violence, prejudice, and few opportunities for constructive entertainment influenced the identity formation and learning disposition of participants. Finally, participants indicated experiencing a variety of personal and psychological difficulties which reinforced their underachievement in school. These students perceived themselves as lacking perseverance,

were confused about their own self-worth, and were at a loss about how to cope with their personal as well as academic difficulties.

The young people who achieved in this study were students who remained in the urban school district throughout their elementary and middle school experiences. Many other academically talented young people did not. For example, several of the participants in this study discussed peers who were academically talented in elementary school who had not made it to high school. According to participants in this study, several young women became pregnant and dropped out of school and several other high potential young men dropped out after becoming involved in drugs and gangs. Other bright young people from this urban area transferred into suburban schools through a program that removes talented students with academic potential and places them in schools in which they will have more opportunities for success in their academic work. Still others left public education after having been lured to area private schools which offer large scholarships to recruit talented minorities. The students who were involved in this study stayed in public schools. Some of them were consistently successful at achieving in school, while some achieved only periodically, and still others underachieved almost all of the time. The degree to which students achieved, the circumstances surrounding their achievement, and their sometimes rapid movement from achievement into patterns of underachievement characterized the experiences of the students who participated in this study.

The high ability achievers in the study generally believed they were getting a good education at South Central High School. They were usually satisfied with their curricular experiences and they believed South Central was a good school. They had no desire to attend private schools or high schools in nearby suburban settings. At times, these young people were frustrated with the bureaucracy of the high school and how it impeded student progress in creating school spirit, yet they thought it was worth continuing to strive for a better school experience. They did not give up on their school and appeared to sincerely believe in many of their fellow students, especially those who were interested in achieving, and the teachers who supported them.

Cultural differences were noted in student perceptions of their experiences. In this school setting, African American students were not proportionately represented in advanced classes or in the high achieving culture created in the school. When counselors, teachers, or students who were asked for names of high achieving African American students for possible inclusion in this study, many were shocked or surprised to realize how few juniors or seniors who were achieving at high levels were mentioned. Wallace, the football star was frequently mentioned, as was one African American female student in this study who was a high achieving student in many areas. However, in the senior class that graduated at the conclusion of the first year of data gathering for this study, only one African American male and one African American female were identified for inclusion in the study, as delineated in the criteria outlined earlier. In order to identify a larger group of African American students for inclusion in the study, student records were examined for the junior, sophomore, and finally, the freshman class. Many leads were followed in our attempts to identify female and male high ability African American students who either achieved or underachieved in school. As noted previously, many females who had been identified as high ability students in elementary schools had become pregnant and were raising their children. A smaller number of students had gotten scholarships and were attending private schools. In several cases, we could not locate high potential African American students who had achieved at high levels in elementary or middle schools. Several had dropped out, some had supposedly transferred to other schools, but could not be found on the lists of students who attended those schools. It is clear that many high potential African American students in this urban area do not achieve at the levels that might have been expected, given their performance in elementary or middle school.

The African American males who did achieve in school dealt with the stereotype of the African American, male teenager and tried to stay committed to academic excellence despite peer pressures. The African American females who achieved did not date or have romantic connections with others. Instead, they stayed focused on their immediate goals of doing well in school and on their future goals of college, and professional careers, such as teaching or medicine. The absence of African American students in this culture of achievement, especially during the last two years of high school is certainly indicative of the need for further research on issues relative to achievement which must be addressed.

Hispanic students (the majority of whom were of Puerto Rican heritage) achieved at high levels in this high school in which the majority of students were Hispanic. The achievement of the Puerto Rican students indicates clearly that students, many of whom were bilingual and who came from low socioeconomic backgrounds, had high levels of achievement despite cultural differences, economic deprivation, and family problems such as their parents' divorce or the drug or gang problems of their siblings. The Hispanic students who immigrated from Puerto Rico often viewed their success in school as a product of the higher quality American education their parents wanted for their children.

Approximately half of the students in each group (students who achieved and students who underachieved) came from families in which their parents had divorced. Parents of students who achieved in school, as a group, had careers which were not markedly different from students who underachieved. As part of their strong belief in self, the high ability achievers had definite aspirations. The supportive relationships that helped to shape and strengthen their belief in self were those which directed their realistic goals for the future. The personal qualities, strengths and talents of the young people were aligned with their aspirations. The adults who influenced them included current and previous teachers, coaches, counselors, parents, and some other relatives. A network of high achieving peers also contributed to the positive relationships that helped develop a network which enabled some of the young people in this study to achieve.

Gender differences were also found in this research. Female high achieving students were extremely supportive of other achieving students (especially other female students), were involved in multiple activities, were independent, resilient, and dedicated to a career. Female underachieving students were often involved with boyfriends, allowed family problems to influence their achievement, were unmotivated, used time unwisely, were negatively influenced by their peers, and had unrealistic aspirations. They rarely caused trouble in school and were often unrecognized as having high abilities. Male achievers had a network of high achieving peers, positive personal traits, reasonable career aspirations, and were also involved in multiple activities. Male underachievers were more likely to cause behavioral problems in school, sought and maintained negative peer relationships, and were negatively influenced by home and family problems as well as problems in the urban environment. Neither female nor male underachievers possessed belief in self exhibited by both male and female students who achieved in school.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT vii

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ix

CHAPTER 1: Introduction 1
- The Problem Addressed in This Study 2
- Background 2
- Methods and Procedures 4
  - Research Questions 5
  - Data Collection and Analysis 5
  - Internal and External Validity 6
  - Definition of Terms 7
- Organization of the Technical Report 7

CHAPTER 2: Review of the Literature 9
- The Urban Educational Crisis 9
- The Changing Demographics 11
- Culturally Different Underachievers in an Urban Environment 13
  - African American Students 13
  - The Ogbu Theory 16
    - Immigrant and Involuntary Minorities 17
    - Immigrant Minorities and the Schools 18
    - Involuntary Minorities and the Schools 19
  - Intracultural Diversity of the Hispanic American 20
    - Cultural Background of Puerto Ricans 21
    - Puerto Rican Families and Achievement 22
    - Puerto Rican Students, Personality, and Academic Achievement 25
    - Hispanics, Puerto Ricans, and Community 26
- Factors Contributing to Achievement 27
  - Resilience 28
- Underachievement 30
  - Underachievement in Different Forms 32
  - When Does Underachievement Begin? 33
  - Causes and Contributors 34
  - Gender Differences 36
  - Behavioral Characteristics of Underachievers 37
  - Parental Characteristics 39
  - School Environment and Underachievement 40
- Summary 41

CHAPTER 3: Research Methodology 43
- Ethnography 43
- Case Study Research 44
- The Beginning of the Study 45
- Selection of Participants 45
  - Sampling Procedure 45
  - Participants 45

Table of Contents (continued)

Data Collection 50
Interviewing 51
Grand Tour Questions and Specific Questions 51
Key Actor or Informant Interviewing 52
Field Notes 52
Tape Recording 53
Non-Verbal Cues 53
Photography 53
Document Review 54
Projective Techniques 54
Outcroppings 54
Proxemics and Kinesics 55
Data 55
Data Storing 55
Data Coding and Data Analyses 55
Open Coding 56
Axial Coding 56
Selective Coding 56
Core Categories 57
Coders and Core Categories 57
Integrative Diagrams 57
The Development of Grounded Theory 58
Establishing the Soundness of the Study 59
Summary 61

CHAPTER 4: Ethnographic Results of the High School Environment 63
A Description of South Central High School in Centerfield 63
The Guidance Office 66
Courses, Programs, and Clubs 68
Study Halls as Warehouses 68
The Faculty Dining Hall 72
Football on Saturday 73
Gang Activity 74
"Winter Wonderland," A Holiday Concert 75
The Pep Rally 76
The Swim Meet With Middlefield 77
About Celebrating Excellence 77
The Heritage Assembly 78
The Learning Resource Center (LRC) 78
The In-House Detention Room 79
A Typical Day in the Life of Orlando 79
Miscellaneous Events 80
The End of a School Day 80

CHAPTER 5: Results of Case Studies 83
A Description of the Participants 83
The Male High Ability Achievers 83
Vaughn 83
Rafael 87
Lucio 89
Orlando 90

Table of Contents (continued)

Matteo 91
Wallace 93
Rob 94
Alfred 95
Jesse 97
The Female High Ability Achievers 97
Nicki 97
Marisa 98
Mary 100
Jana 100
Rosa 101
Toni 102
Alexa 104
Tania 104
Claire 106
The Male High Ability Underachievers 109
John 109
Benton 111
Mitch 112
Chico 114
Morgan 116
Skip 117
Martin 120
Greg 120
Kevin 121
Leo 122
Marwin 123
Milton 124
The Female High Ability Underachievers 125
Mandy 125
Sandra 125
Rose Marie 127
Yvellise 127
Ivy 129

CHAPTER 6: Results of the Cross-Case Grounded Theory Analysis 133
Factors Influencing Achievement 133
Belief in Self 133
Personal Characteristics 136
Sensitivity 136
Independence 138
Determination to Succeed 139
Appreciation of Cultural Diversity 140
Inner Will 141
Resilience 142

Table of Contents (continued)

Support Systems 145
Network for High Achieving Students 145
Family Support 146
Supportive Adults 149
Supportive Adults at South Central High School 150
Coach Brogan and the Boys' Swim Team 154
Participation in Special Programs, Extracurricular Activities, and Summer Enrichment Programs 155
Appropriately Challenging Classes 158
Realistic Aspirations 160
The High Ability Underachievers 162
School Factors 165
Inappropriate Early Curricular Experiences in Elementary School 162
Absence of Opportunities to Develop Appropriate Work Habits 164
Negative Interaction With Teachers 166
Absence of Challenge in High School 168
Questionable Counseling Experiences 170
Family Issues 173
Family Dysfunction 174
Strained Relations With Family Members 175
Problems With Siblings and Sibling Rivalry 177
Inconsistent Role Models and Value Systems in the Family 178
Minimal Parental Academic Monitoring, Guidance, and Expectations 180
Community Factors 181
Negative School Environment 181
Hostile Urban Environment 182
Inappropriate Peer Group Issues 185
Personal Factors Influencing Academic Underachievement 187
Behavior Problems and Disciplinary Issues 187
Problems With Unstructured Time 188
Confused or Unrealistic Aspirations 189
Insufficient Perseverance and Low Self Efficacy 191
Inappropriate Coping Strategies 193
Summary 195

CHAPTER 7: Research Questions, Discussion, Grounded Theory, and Implications 197
Research Question 1: What do talented students in an urban high school expect from their school experience? 197
Research Question 2: What support systems (family, school, community) are recognized by talented students in an urban environment? 199
Research Question 3: What views do talented students hold of their urban high school environment? 200

Table of Contents (continued)

Research Question 4: What relationships guide the behaviors, attitudes, and aspirations of talented students in an urban environment? 201
Research Question 5: What gender differences exist between talented students (across cultures) who achieve and underachieve in school? 202
Research Question 6: What experiences do talented Puerto Rican students who achieve and underachieve perceive as contributing to their underachievement? 202
Research Question 7: What experiences do talented African American students who achieve and underachieve perceive as contributing to their underachievement? 207
Causes and Contributors of Underachievement 212
Family Factors 212
Behavioral Characteristics of Underachievers 213
Grounded Theory 214
Recommendations for Further Research 218

References 221

List of Tables

Table 1	Student Demographics for Grade Level, Race/Ethnicity, Test Information, QPA Average, and Class Track	46
Table 2	Course Offerings at South Central High School	69
Table 3	Typical Activities and Events During the Second Semester at South Central High School	81
Table 4	Family and Parental Demographics	84
Table 5	Factors Influencing the Academic Performance of High Ability Puerto Rican Female Students	204
Table 6	Factors Influencing the Academic Performance of High Ability Puerto Rican Male Students	206
Table 7	Gender Differences Influencing the Academic Performance of High Ability Puerto Rican Students	207
Table 8	Factors Influencing the Academic Performance of High Ability African American Female Students	208
Table 9	Factors Influencing the Academic Performance of High Ability African American Male Students	209

List of Figures

Figure 1	Factors Influencing the Achievement of Talented Urban Students	215
Figure 2	Causal Paradigm of Underachievement for Puerto Rican and African American High Ability Male and Female Students	217

Case Studies of Talented Students Who Achieve and Underachieve in an Urban High School

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

This technical report chronicles the experiences of 35 intelligent young men and women in an urban high school written in the tradition of educational anthropology. In this report, pseudonyms are used to preserve the anonymity of the school, the community, and the people who are described. Many of these young people succeeded and indeed, excelled in school, despite remarkable odds; others failed, despite their high abilities. The technical report is presented as an ethnography, a written account and interpretation of the daily events observed while participating as researchers in the high school culture. In this study, four researchers spent a total of over 240 days over a two and a half year period. Three of the researchers were White, one Hispanic, and one African American. The purpose of the study is to examine closely the experiences of high ability students in an urban high school environment and develop a better understanding of why some bright young men and women achieve in this setting while others underachieve. Though ethnographers have spent a great deal of time examining the "intensity" (Reed, 1982) of the problems of inner-city high schools, there is a paucity of research focusing on achievement of high ability students in the urban setting. Our hope is that this study of high ability students in an inner city high school will begin to address that void.

To begin this investigation, we considered the plight of culturally diverse high ability youth in high schools throughout our nation's urban centers. America has enjoyed a long history of creative productivity, however, in recent years our nation's preeminence has been placed at risk, as much by decaying standards and performance in our educational system as by intensified competition from abroad. If we are to continue to maintain a position of world leadership, it is imperative that a significant portion of our educational resources be invested in those young people who have high potential for making creative contributions to all fields of human endeavor. It is also imperative that opportunities for the development of high potential be extended to the vast number of young people that frequently have been excluded from educational programs for high ability students because of race, gender, or socioeconomic background. With this agenda as its mission, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act funded The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT). The NRC/GT directorate, located at the the University of Connecticut, conducted a comprehensive national assessment of research needs in 1990-91, and the results of the needs assessment serve as a basis for creating research projects focusing on the highest priority topics. In response to the paucity of research providing explanations of minority students' achievement, high ability students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds were identified as a priority. This study has addressed an important mission of The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented by having examined the secondary school experiences of high ability students in an economically

disadvantaged urban environment. Through ethnographic fieldwork, the study has identified the patterns of school life experienced by high ability students in an urban high school. By examining differences between high ability students who achieved and those who underachieved, we hoped to be able to identify strategies that would enable urban students to realize their potential.

The Problem Addressed in This Study

High ability students from culturally diverse populations have existed in large urban environments for generations; yet, many do not achieve at a level commensurate with their ability. Educators must acquire a better understanding of the educational needs of these students as many urban school districts address the educational needs of culturally diverse populations. With this knowledge, policy makers must begin to plan educational programs which will most effectively meet the needs of this changing population and improve the educational gains of all students. The problems addressed in this study, therefore, were the experiences and needs of high ability students in an urban setting and the factors that distinguish between high ability youth who achieve and underachieve.

Background

Hundreds of thousands of apathetic students abandon high school each year to begin lives of unemployment, poverty, crime and psychological distress. According to Hahn (1987), "Dropout rates ranging from 40 to 60% in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit and other major cities point to a situation of crisis proportions." Clifford (1990) states:

> . . . the term dropout may not be adequate to convey the disastrous consequences of the abandonment of school by children and adolescents; educational suicide may be a far more appropriate label. . . . School abandonment is not confined to a small percentage of minority students, or low ability children, or mentally lazy kids. It is a systematic failure affecting the most gifted and knowledgeable as well as the disadvantaged, and it is threatening the social, economic, intellectual, industrial, cultural, moral and psychological well being of our country. (p. 22)

Ayers (1991) claims that schools have not responded to the "dazzling array of needs and potentials that youngsters bring to school today" (p. 70). Ayers blames the rigid structure of the schools stating, "too many schools are organized with a mythical child in mind, someone like Beaver from 'Leave it to Beaver'. When the children who arrive at the schoolhouse door don't look or act like Beaver, don't have his wry sense of humor or his experiences and skills, they are often deemed unteachable by inflexible and narrow schools" (p. 70). Ayers indicates the time has come for educators to appreciate and better understand the multicultural populations of our American classrooms.

A growing recognition exists among educators that a new era has arrived and tomorrow's citizens will be required to function in a culturally diverse, complex world. Several factors contribute to this growing recognition, including the significant population growth among people of color, and increasing enrollments of minority students in the nation's schools. Demographic changes indicate that one in three Americans will be a person of color by the turn of the century (Banks, 1991; Hyland, 1989). Demographic reports indicate that many urban neighborhoods have become increasingly poor, minority, and non-English speaking. By 1980, 81% of all African Americans and 88% of Hispanics

resided in metropolitan areas; 71 and 50%, respectively, lived in the inner cities (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980). In a 1991 federal census report, the city of Centerfield (a pseudonym for the actual city in which the study was conducted) reported a population which was 38.9% African American and 31.6% Hispanic (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991). Related demographic studies of school-age children in the United States provide information about the graduating class of the year 2000. For example, the Hispanic population, highly concentrated in urban areas, has experienced the most dramatic growth in the last twenty years and the Census Bureau projects that by the year 2000, 18% of the youth population in our country will be Hispanic and that a decade later this will increase to 21%. The Hispanic population is also one of the most impoverished ethnic groups with 41% of the population currently living in families whose income is below the poverty level (Dryfoos, 1990). Coupled with the expanding population figures is the contention that Hispanics are the most undereducated group in America. Currently, Hispanics have the highest dropout rate, 36%, of all major population subgroups and are disproportionately represented in a number of school programs such as special education programs. Hispanics constitute only 5% of those children enrolled in gifted programs (Hyland, 1989). At the high school level, Hispanics are invariably underrepresented in the honors, academic or college-bound tracks and overrepresented in general or vocational programs (Orum, 1986).

Many Hispanic students, especially Puerto Ricans, are considered educationally at risk. For instance, educational data on Hispanic students reflect a picture of low achievement levels, high dropout rates, poor school attendance rates, higher placements in special education and remedial tracks, higher enrollment in segregated schools and under-representation in gifted programs (Alvarez, 1992; Bradby, 1992; Meléndez, 1986; Passow, 1986; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988). Therefore, major concerns relating the education of Hispanic students exist.

The need for this study is particularly clear. Although some resources are being devoted to study the phenomenon of underachievement, not enough consideration has been dedicated to Hispanic gifted underachievers. There are only a few investigations that address the issue of underachievement among those gifted students labeled as "minority" students. However, what most of these attempts do is to fuse Hispanics with Blacks without major concern for the uniqueness of each group and/or subgroup (Hine, 1991). Furthermore, research on underachievement among Puerto Rican students (as well as other students from groups who are economically disadvantaged and are identified as high ability or gifted) is absent. Hispanic high ability underachievers seem to be a neglected population in educational services as well as in educational research. Thus, more research on this population is needed.

African American students also comprise a significant percentage of our urban high schools and their underrepresentation in educational programs for the gifted is a cause for great concern. In 1977, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm introduced legislation to include funding for gifted and talented minority and culturally different children (Davis & Rimm, 1989). In a keynote address before the National Forum on Minority and Disadvantaged Gifted and Talented, Chisholm (1978) pointed out the failure of our educational system to nurture the talents of gifted disadvantaged students, faulting American education for inadequate methods of recognizing talent among culturally different children. Historical precedents and lack of empirical data on appropriate identification processes and educational planning techniques have been noted as part of the reason for this failure (Baldwin, 1987). Authorities in gifted education argue that the predominant use of IQ and achievement tests cannot be depended upon to assess the capabilities of this population (Baldwin, 1977; Frasier, 1989; Hilliard, 1976; Torrance, 1971). Many intervening variables such as socioeconomic deprivation and a relative perception of powerlessness should be

considered by educators in locating the hidden talents of the African American child (Baldwin, 1987).

Whether the problem is examined according to theories of economic deprivation, cultural factors, social forces or psychological factors, much of the research has failed to place academic achievement observations within a framework of strengths. For this reason, there is little research focusing on minority achievement. This priority is crucial to educators such as Joyce Oatman of Tilman High School in Chicago, Illinois. After teaching for 34 years in the inner-city public high schools on the South Side of Chicago, Joyce Oatman reminds us:

> People need to know that there are gifted children here. People who live in the inner city, in the barrio or on the reservation need to know that their children are gifted. There's too much raw ability going through the cracks. If a child we might lose had the ability to cure cancer but ends up joining a gang or dealing dope, that's a double loss to the country. (Ryan, 1991, p. 15)

Oatman's concerns highlight the importance of examining the underachievement of high ability youth. Underachievement is a perplexing problem for all educators. The literature describes various methods for identifying high ability underachievers. Unfortunately, the range of definitions includes recommendations that are either too vague or restrictive to be practical in school settings (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982). Programs for underachieving high ability students are categorized in two ways: those focusing on intensive counseling services and those implementing specific educational strategies (Pirozzo, 1982). Many programs implementing counseling techniques have resulted in limited success due to one of the following: a lack of commitment on the part of the students and inadequate training of counselors concerning this particular population (Doyle, Gottlieb, & Schneider, 1979). Educational strategies focusing solely on the structure of the classroom environment have not proven successful (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982). Strategies that have worked are long-term, lasting at least one to two years (Whitmore, 1980); they combine cognitive and affective techniques (Crittenden, Kaplan, & Heim, 1984; Gonzalez & Hayes, 1988); and involve a parent component (Emerick, 1991; Whitmore, 1986).

In summary, a crisis exists in many urban schools. Several theorists have posited various explanations for the reasons minority and economically disadvantaged students do not succeed in school. Unfortunately, little research exists on high-ability students in an urban environment. This study is an attempt to add to the limited information on this population.

Methods and Procedures

Because these research questions require a qualitative approach, ethnographic research methods are appropriate for the study of high ability students in an urban environment. "Rather than studying people" ethnography means "learning from people" (Spradley, 1979, p. 3). Ethnography is the work of describing a culture, in this instance, the culture of high ability males and females in an urban high school. "The central aim of ethnography is to understand another way of life from the native point of view" (Spradley, 1980, p. 3). To understand student life in an urban high school, the appropriate sources are the young men and women who are actually living it. We need to understand their experiences as expressed through their own words. Therefore, an ethnographic

methodology was the appropriate method of inquiry. Studying high ability youth in an urban high school environment naturally lent itself to ethnographic methodology.

Research Questions

What are the characteristics of the young people in urban schools who have high abilities but fail to demonstrate them in their school settings? How and why do some young people achieve in urban schools, while many young men and women who have high intellectual potential do not experience academic success? This study describes the experiences of these students to provide insight about why the urban high school experience helped some students achieve academically while it had little influence on others. The study also attempts to describe how the urban high school experience is different for the two populations identified, students who achieve, and students who underachieve in school. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What do talented students in an urban high school expect from their school experience?
2. What support systems (family, school, community) are recognized by talented students in an urban environment?
3. What views do talented students hold of their urban high school environment?
4. What relationships guide the behaviors, attitudes, and aspirations of talented students in an urban environment?
5. Do gender differences exist between talented students (across cultures) who achieve and underachieve in school?
6. What experiences do talented Puerto Rican students who achieve and underachieve perceive as contributing to their underachievement?
7. What experiences do talented African American students who achieve and do not achieve perceive as contributing to their underachievement?

Data Collection and Analysis

To obtain the subjects' perceptions, a combination of participant observation and ethnographic interviews was used to gather data. Participant observation is a strategy ethnographers use for listening to people and watching them in their natural settings (Spradley, 1979, p. 32). Observations or the "systematic description of events, behaviors and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 79) were conducted. The young people were observed at different times of the day, at school and in the community. Observation and interview data were collected from social, athletic, and academic settings. During school visits, documentation encompassed students' participation in all of their subject classes as well as in a variety of other settings such as athletic events, after-school clubs, and at home with parents and siblings. These observations had no specific structure but were guided by an established procedure. The researchers' purpose was to approach the site as one who is new to the setting and to describe the physical and social setting of the site. While the classroom was the main focus of observation, information gained in the classroom and through interviews led the researcher to other observations and interviews.

In-depth interviewing was conducted with the identified students, teachers, administrators, school counselors, coaches, parents, siblings and other relatives, community members, and other parties as they emerged through data gathering techniques. These semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore a few general topics in order not only to gain information in "the subjects own words" but to "develop insight on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (Bogdan & Biklen,

1982, p. 135). The interviews were conducted in order to obtain a complete understanding of the views of the participants themselves, providing a clear understanding of the experiences of high ability students in an urban high school. By interviewing participants, a picture of what each participant believes is happening emerged allowing each person to tell his side of the story. Similar "grand tour questions" (Spradley, 1979, p. 86) were asked of all subjects in order to obtain each subject's viewpoint on the research questions guiding the study. For example, a student might have been asked, "Tell me about the extracurricular activities in this high school" as a grand tour question and a more specific follow-up question might have been, "How has the Engineering Club assisted you in achieving academically?" The subject's answers to the general questions guided the direction of the interview to obtain a deeper understanding of each subject's point of view.

Appropriate documents were also obtained from school records or requested from participants. Formal documents, such as gifted program identification policies, as well as informal documents, such as samples of student work, the program from a winter concert, or posters advertising Student Council political campaigns, were collected. The review of documents while conducting observations and interviews provided a clearer picture of the urban high school culture being studied.

The total field study transpired over two and a half years until data saturation was reached. Data "saturation" occurred when the information yielded had become redundant and did not offer useful reinforcement of information previously collected (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1982). Field notes and observation notes recorded during the observations, interviews and after document review, were as detailed and concrete as possible to keep inferences at a low level (Pelto & Pelto, 1978). These field notes, and copies of documents were coded and analyzed for patterns, themes, and topics using inductive and logical analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). As the patterns, themes, and topics emerged the researcher evaluated "the plausibility of these developing hypotheses . . . testing them against the data" and challenged the themes as they emerged by looking for alternative explanations for them (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 118).

Internal and External Validity

What becomes important to a qualitative researcher is that the study be trustworthy and based on data which are accurate and comprehensive. Qualitative researchers view reliability as a fit between what is recorded as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The following techniques, discussed by Marshall & Rossman (1989) were used to establish the trustworthiness of this study: a search for negative instances and alternative explanations, value-free note taking, and the researcher constantly asking questions of the data. In addition, several persons who played "devil's advocate" challenging the researchers' analysis were included in the research process.

Validity and reliability of research are crucial in all educational research regardless of the methods used. Data must be accurate, authentic, and represent reality. The replicability of research should also enable investigators to produce findings which add relevant aspects to increased understanding of the phenomenon. Ethnographic validity refers to the degree to which participant observation achieves what it is supposed to discover, namely, the authentic representation of what is happening in a social situation (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). To maximize the validity of this study, the following techniques were used: "thick" description, extensive time spent in the field setting, persistent observation, and providing the "data base" for other researchers to transfer the findings of the study to other populations. Ethnographic reliability refers to the repeatability of a given study by researchers other than the original participant observer

(LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). To enhance the reliability, a complete description of the research process has been included, so that independent researchers may replicate the same procedures in comparable settings.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as they apply to this investigation:

Achievement—Mastery over a certain body of information after instruction has taken place; acquired school skills (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1988).

Gifted student—Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess and unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, p. 3).

Gifted/High ability underachiever—Person who has high academic potential as measured by IQ and/or achievement tests but who is not being successful in school This person possesses a high ability, but his/her actual performance only reaches low or average levels which are far from their real capacity (Supplee, 1990).

Organization of the Technical Report

This technical report is presented in seven chapters. This chapter provided an introduction to the study. In Chapter 2, existing research and literature on the subject of high ability students in an urban environment are summarized. The methodology used in this study is discussed in Chapter 3, and Chapter 4 provides a description of the high school environment. Case studies of the 35 participants in the study are presented in Chapter 5 and the results are summarized in Chapter 6. A discussion of the results and the grounded theory which emerged in the study is presented in Chapter 7 as are implications for educators, parents, and community leaders.

CHAPTER 2: Review of the Literature

When interviewed by a journalist, the mayor of Centerfield during the time period in which this study was conducted, explained that she believed in Centerfield, her birthplace, and lifelong home. Though crime, guns, gangs, unemployment, hunger, homelessness, drugs, AIDS, and infant mortality plagued the city, the former mayor said she never ceased to be amazed at the resilience and the determination of the people who live there. And she insisted in a newspaper article that "blocks are being put in place for a better future" (Roessner, 1993, p. 8). She reinforced her positive attitude and her belief in the strength of urban America when she stated,

> Cities have cycles. They will be what they will be. They have always been periodically written off, and they always come back. You don't read about the little hamlets in the history books. You read about Athens, Paris, Rome, Berlin. We really are the citadels of civilization, and as long as our civilization survives, our cities will too. (Roessner, 1993, p. 8)

Many community leaders and citizens of urban America, call upon our nation's youth to address the problems faced by the cities. Many educators believe that the future of our cities depends on our young people. Therefore, the achievement of high ability youth in urban America is a matter of significant and growing concern to the educational community.

The review of literature presented in this chapter will focus on four major areas which provide a theoretical rationale for the study: (1) the educational crisis in urban America, (2) changing demographics and educational achievement among culturally diverse students, (3) current findings specific to the academic achievement of African Americans and Puerto Ricans, and (4) the complexity of issues involving underachievement in high ability students.

The Urban Educational Crisis

> Urban renewal has breathed fresh life into vast stretches of the nation's cities. Ramshackle structures have been razed, glass towers have risen, and city blocks have been beautified with plants, parks and walking spaces. Cities have spacious convention centers, new hotels, and banks that look like great cathedrals. But what about the schools? (Carnegie Foundation, 1988, p. xii)

Regardless of the gleaming high rise complexes and impressive skylines of our nation's cites, the urban centers remain a place where education is often neglected, leaving the glittering signs of progress nothing more than a shameful facade. Throughout the nation's urban centers, serious problems have plagued the public schools for generations. In Cleveland, Ohio, one high school is situated near a bustling intersection of commercial activity, "but so many surrounding buildings have been razed that now the vacant land makes the school look like a forgotten outpost in an underdeveloped country" (Carnegie Foundation, 1988, p. xii). In that same city, in 1987, only one public high school student was a semi-finalist in the National Merit Scholarship Competition, which identifies 15,000 students nationwide. That same year, in a Chicago high school, only 10% of the entering sophomore class were able to read effectively while in New Orleans, the average high school senior was reading at a level exceeded by 80% of the students in the country (Carnegie Foundation, 1988).

Chicago's schools have been on the verge of collapse for years. Nearly 50% who enter Chicago high schools drop out or fail to graduate with their classes. Of those who do graduate on time, only about one-third can read at grade level. Approximately 35,000 students, or 11%, are absent on any given day and half of those absent students are chronically truant (Ayers, 1991). An administrator at Camden High School in Camden, New Jersey reported that his school district could not afford facilities for lunch, so 2,000 students left school every day to obtain lunch elsewhere. Many did not bother to return, and nonattendance and dropout rates were very high (Kozol, 1991).

A high school teacher in East St. Louis, Missouri for almost 30 years explained that he struggled to keep his students in his history classes yet the challenge at times became overwhelming. He described the problem saying:

> Of 33 children who begin the history classes in the standard track, more than one quarter have dropped out by spring semester. Maybe 24 are left by June. Mind you, this is in junior year. We're speaking of the children who have survived. Ninth and tenth grades are the more horrendous years for leaving school. (Kozol, 1991, p. 29)

Urban high schools in the Northeast reported similar problems. An appraisal offered by the City-wide Education Coalition in Boston, Massachusetts concluded,

> Not only do 44% of Boston's high school students drop out before they reach 12th grade, but only 40% of those who do reach 12th grade score below the 30th percentile on a standardized reading test. They may graduate, but they are functionally illiterate. (Carnegie Foundation, 1988, p. xiii)

> A 16-year-old student in the South Bronx explained that he went to English class for two months in the fall of 1989 before the school supplied him with a textbook. He spent the entire academic year without a science text. "My mother offered to help me with my science, which was hard for me, but I could not bring home a book. (Kozol, 1991, p. 110)

A first-year English teacher at another high school in the Bronx described her desperate situation,

> I've got five classes—42 in each! We have no textbooks yet. I'm using my old textbook from the seventh grade. They're doing construction all around me so the noise is quite amazing. They're actually drilling in the hall outside my room. I have more kids than desks in all five classes. . . . A student came in today whom I had never seen. I said, "We'll have to wait and see if someone doesn't come so you can have a chair." She looked at me and said, "I'm leaving." (Kozol, 1991, p. 111)

In Centerfield, Melvin Kardulis, a gifted 17-year-old high school artist and dancer, was walking home from a local video store, having completed an errand for his grandmother. Following a senseless exchange of words with another African American teenager, Melvin became the victim of a homicide. The 16-year-old youth who was charged for murder carried a gun for protection. The city of Centerfield grieved deeply. The art department in Melvin's school created a multi-media exhibit on inner-city violence entitled "Martin, Malcolm and Melvin." It included a video of Melvin dancing.

In the nation's capital, an educator known for his unconventional methods, was concerned with the drug problem facing his students. He took groups of students to the District of Columbia morgue and pulled back the sheets on the bodies to show children the

ultimate product of violence and drugs. The students viewed a corpse riddled with 11 bullet holes. The victim's mouth had been taped shut with duct tape. One of the students in the group recognized the body as someone from his neighborhood (Gup, 1992).

Chico Medrano, a 15-year-old New York City teenager provided his view of the urban crisis when he explained:

> There is a lot of violence and a lot of drugs where I grow up. I went to a party, and there was a shoot-out. You're constantly living in danger. Who you gonna look up to? Bill Cosby or somebody that comes out shooting a lot? (Scott-Gregory, 1992, p. 46)

The austere life of an inner-city youngster is a life of deprivations as described by Nelson, Palonsky, and Carlson (1990). They remind us that a child growing up in Brooklyn may never have been to Manhattan. "No books other than comic books, and a few magazines of a trashier sort" are left lying around by adults. A personal computer is as removed from possibility as a private spaceship" (p. 75). A closer reality may be a "summer camp sponsored by the Fresh Air Fund or the St. Vincent de Paul Society" (p. 75). Few conversations take place with adults at all, and they may be of a very abrupt nature, "because the only permanent adult in the home is a badly harried mother trying to hold her life together" (p. 75). The television set remains the "constant companion and a purveyor of distorted reality and false hopes" (p. 75).

The problems described above represent what urban schools have grappled with for generations. For the past century, urban educators have been faced with the difficulties of educating poor, culturally diverse and non-English-speaking immigrant youth. The school-related problems these groups typically face such as low academic achievement, school failure, truancy, and dropping out have been compounded by linguistic and cultural differences, poverty, and crime.

The Changing Demographics

The challenges to urban education have increased over the past decades. Dramatic population shifts, including the out-migration of many middle-class families from urban areas and an influx of poor immigrants, have brought about greater isolation of low income and culturally diverse children in the poorest schools and neighborhoods. Social science analyses of the growing urban underclass have indicated major demographic changes in inner cities. The U.S. Census Bureau (1990) statistics report that by the year 2020, the U.S. population will be 30% African American and Hispanic and many will live in poverty. People of color will comprise the majority populations in several states. African American and Hispanic youth are already the majority population in many urban school districts.

The changing demographics of our nation will affect everyone in the years ahead. The increasing diversity of student populations will have serious implications for our schools. Currently, the schools are not serving our African American and Hispanic youth well and these disparities are reflected in standardized test scores. Data on suspensions, expulsions, retentions, and dropout rates indicate that far too many minority students are being distanced from mainstream America. The continued underachievement and isolation of such a large and growing population is nothing short of a national tragedy. Unless more resources are put into the resolution of this crisis, the U.S. will remain a "Nation at Risk" (Kuykendall, 1992).

The National Urban League (1992) reported that African American youth are being buffeted by a series of forces that, if allowed to go unchecked, could create a "lost generation" and that if this generation is lost, much of the nation's hope for economic, social and technological survival will be lost as well (Kuykendall, 1992). The concerns discussed above are supported by the following statistics:

> During the last decade, the proportion of Black men attending college suffered the largest decline of all racial and gender groups. (American Council on Education/Education Commission of the States, 1988, as cited in Kuykendall, 1992)
>
> One out of every four Black men between the ages of 20 and 29 and one out of every eight Hispanic men of the same age is either in jail, on trial, or on parole. (U.S. Department of Justice, 1991, as cited in Kuykendall, 1992)
>
> The fastest-growing homicide population is Black males between the ages of 11 and 22. (National Urban League, 1989, as cited in Kuykendall, 1992)
>
> The largest increases in poverty are among Black without a college education. (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1988, as cited in Kuykendall, 1992)
>
> In Milwaukee, Wisconsin where African American males constitute just 28% of the total enrollment, during the 1989-90 academic year 50% of the students suspended were African American males. During that same period, only 19% of the 5,700 African American males in Milwaukee high schools had grade point averages as high as 2.0. (Leake & Leake, 1992, p. 784)

According to the statistics cited below provided by the National Council of LaRaza (NCLR) in the report entitled "State of Hispanic America" (1991), the future for Hispanic youth is even less hopeful. Hispanics are less likely than other racial or ethnic groups in this country to complete high school. Hispanics are more likely than African Americans to be segregated in inner city schools. A statistical report published by NCLR in 1984 stated that "Hispanics now have the dubious distinction of being not only the most undereducated group of American children, but also the most highly segregated." The NCLR reported that more than one-fourth of Hispanic children attended schools with minority enrollments of 90 to 100% (Hyland, 1989).

While these statistics are enough cause for alarm, there are some other disturbing trends which are not as easily documented. Many school districts point out that dropout rates among their African American and Hispanic students are relatively low. However, the mere completion of high school by these young people does not solve the problem since too many minority students are still receiving high school diplomas without the requisite motivation to lead enriched and productive lives. Though they have acquired their high school diplomas, many still lack the motivation to achieve lifelong success (Kuykendall, 1992).

Kuykendall further elaborated on the importance of instilling this motivation for the achievement of lifelong success:

> Whether we are losing our youth 'physically' through persistent dropout and expulsion trends or whether we are losing them mentally or emotionally, the bottom line is still the same. When they become convinced that they will not succeed academically, when they become convinced that they will not make it in 'mainstream' America as a result of academic underachievement, they take whatever skills and ingenuity *they* think they possess and seek the 'low' road to life. Without the skills

and motivation necessary for legitimate prosperity, even high school graduates are likely to turn to unproductive pursuits—becoming prey to those who would enlist them in criminal and even violent activity. The challenge for educators is to make more of these youth make it to that 'high road' of life. (p. xiv)

Culturally Different Underachievers in an Urban Environment

The majority of the literature on underachievement focuses on bright underachievers who typically come from upper-middle class families. The research devoted to high ability African American youth is limited. Ford and Harris (1990) examined the relevant literature on minority gifted children, particularly African American, and discovered that of 4,109 published articles on gifted youth since 1924, less than two percent (75) addressed minority children of color. The percentage would be even lower if one counted only those articles about gifted and talented African American youngsters. These numbers are disheartening because less information means less understanding of the academic achievement needs of culturally diverse students in our urban high schools.

African American Students

Educators and researchers have agreed on some findings regarding the barriers to the recognition of and assistance for gifted African American youth. For example, the number of African American students identified as gifted remains small. Several factors named as hindrances in the identification of African American students include: the use of definitions of giftedness that reflect middle class majority culture values and perceptions (Maker, 1983); the use of standardized tests that do not reflect the exceptional abilities of children of color (Davis & Rimm, 1985; Ford & Harris, 1990; Kitano & Kirby, 1986; MacMillan, 1982; Richert, Alvino, & McDonnel, 1982) low socioeconomic status causing differences in environmental opportunities that enhance intellectual achievement (Clark, 1983; Gallagher, 1985; Kitano & Kirby, 1986; Maker, 1983); and cultural differences in the manifestation of gifted behaviors (Baldwin, 1985; Clark, 1983; Davis & Rimm, 1985; Ford & Harris, 1990; Frierson, 1965; Gay, 1978; Kitano & Kirby, 1986; Torrance, 1977). Current identification procedures generally have included some adjustment to accommodate these deviations from middle-class, majority-culture standards, limitations in environmental opportunities, and depressed scores on standardized tests (Frasier, 1987).

Along with a lack of inclusion in programs for the gifted and talented, and although the differences have narrowed since the mid-1970s, African American students continue to lag well behind Whites in key measures of academic achievement, including SAT scores, reading proficiency, and college enrollment (Hill, 1990). Social scientists and educators have focused on the lack of success of minority children for generations yet there is a dearth of research focusing on *achievement* within the African American population. Explaining why some African American students do well in school while others do poorly remains one of the most important and controversial problems in public education today (Cummings, 1977).

Among the many theories advanced to explain variations in the academic performance of African American youngsters, one, in particular, gained prominence. This is the notion that variations in the quality of family life strongly influenced an African American child's school performance. Though this interpretation gained prominence and popularity among educators, there remains considerable debate over its validity. The body of scholarly literature which focused on family-based determinants of variations in academic performance has come to be known as the cultural deprivation theory.

Educational researchers who subscribed to this approach believed that poor academic performance among minority students was traced to a basic failure of the socialization process in the home. Early childhood experiences in poverty environments created personality formations that were adverse to effective achievement in the classroom as well as in all areas of life (Katz, 1969). Generally, this interpretation started because some African American children did poorly in school. The assumption was then made that some aspects of their family life influenced school performance. Black children became victims of their environment, beginning school careers psychologically, socially, and physically disadvantaged. These children were oriented to the present rather than to the future, to immediate needs rather than delayed gratification and to the concrete rather than the abstract. They were often handicapped by limited verbal skills, low self-esteem, and low aspirations (Dolce, 1969).

Other scholars elaborated on this position and suggested that mental ability itself was greatly influenced by childhood experiences in the home. Ausubel (1963) maintained that some home environments were more enriched and stimulating than others and children in deprived homes suffered from an impoverished language-symbolic system and a paucity of information, concepts, and adults as sources of information. Deutsch and Brown (1964) identified several factors within the home that created the negative experiences leading to stunted intellectual development. According to these scholars, the deprived child came from a home lacking in objects, utensils, furniture, and color variations which served as reference points in language development. Language development was also retarded due to the failure of parents to read, teach, and interact with their children. These scholars also suggested that a deprived home was lacking in cultural resources such as books, encyclopedias and magazines and this environmental deficiency hampered the development of intellectual and verbal skills among the children raised in these homes. The interpretation suggested, then, that minority children from urban environments were doomed to fail even before they entered school (Cummings, 1977).

Not only were the environments of these children lacking, but the parents may have perpetuated their children's disadvantages. Some researchers maintained that matricentric family structures and frequent father absence produced a low need to achieve among African American males. According to this point of view, young males deprived of a masculine role model tended to develop personality traits which undermined the motivation needed to achieve success in school. Since African American families were characterized by relatively high incidences of father absences and multiple mothering, their children were especially susceptible to these negative family influences. Though much attention focused on the high divorce rate and frequent father absence among African American families, the relationship of these variables to variations in academic performance of the children was not all that clear. Katz (1969) indicated that although some evidence supported the father-absence hypothesis, a great deal of research was present that contradicted this supposition.

Though the relationship between the family stability and actual achievement was not clear, Rosen and D'Andrade (1959) suggested that variations in exposure to parental praise and independence training significantly influenced achievement motivation. According to these researchers, parents who set high achievement expectations for their children, who encouraged their children to be independent, self-reliant and autonomous, and who rewarded and reinforced their children's behavior in a warm, positive manner produced high achievers. However, parents who were harsh and authoritarian with their children, who had lower expectations and who allowed their children little autonomy produced traits in children which were adverse to positive school performance. These researchers suggested that variations in the way in which parents treated their children greatly influenced their children's school performance. Ausubel and Ausubel (1958) maintained that lower class African American parents tended to be either overly permissive and lax with their children or

overly harsh and authoritarian. According to this point of view, overly harsh parents tended to produce children who had little need to achieve and overly permissive parents increased the chances that their children would be exposed to the negative influences of the peer group, the inner city street culture.

On another level, some evidence documented the relationship between socioeconomic status, parental success expectations, parental encouragement to pursue higher education, variations in academic performance, and educational attainment aspirations. Generally, this research indicated that the higher level of socioeconomic status (SES), the higher the level of parental educational attainment aspirations, and the higher the level of student's educational attainment aspirations, as well as actual performance in school (Cummings, 1977).

In attempting to explain specifically what it is about socioeconomic status that influenced variations in achievement and aspirations, Sewell and Shah (1968) reported that not only did high SES parents generally have higher success expectations, they also tended to encourage their children to pursue higher education more frequently than did lower SES parents. Therefore, some evidence existed which suggested that the failure of lower class parents to encourage and support their children's school activities influenced their actual school performance. Among the African American population, however, the data are unclear. Some research findings suggested that orientations toward success among African American parents and children were no different than those held by White parents and children. Other researchers suggested that if differences in achievement orientations did exist, it was only because poor African American parents often accepted alternative values because of the sharp contradiction between cultural ideals and the realities of urban life in poverty.

Accompanying research regarding problems produced by poor family socialization, there exists a body of research literature which suggests that African American youngsters have internalized White stereotypes of their race. Some investigators hypothesized that the personality damage which resulted from exposure to prejudice and discrimination explained why African American students performed so poorly in school. According to this point of view, these children were locked into cycles of low self-esteem, defeat, hopelessness, and frustration. Because of these attitudes, they lacked the motivation needed to perform well academically.

Several studies presented evidence showing that a sense of control over one's fate was related to variations in scholastic performance among African American children. Gurin (1969) suggested that African American children lacked a sense of control over their lives and manifested a subtle form of group and self-hatred. These children tended to blame themselves for school failure rather than blaming a faulty school system. Grier and Cobbs (1968) suggested the degree to which parents shielded their children from, and prepared them for, the damaging effects of prejudice and discrimination, influenced the way their children felt about themselves as well as the world around them. Researchers hypothesized that the way in which African American parents prepared their children to face a hostile White world greatly influenced the development of personality characteristics that were associated with differences in school success. However, Cummings (1975), Cummings and Carerre (1975) and McCarthy and Yancey (1971) challenged the traditional beliefs about personal instability in African American children and demonstrated through their research that levels of self-esteem and levels of personal instability did not differ significantly between African American children and White children.

The Ogbu Theory

Other researchers believed that the cultural deprivation theory warranted a more critical examination since it did not have consistent empirical support. Instead, they offered new approaches in examining the question of achievement within culturally diverse urban youth. One theory that may help to explain the underachievement of high ability urban youth was posited by Ogbu (1974, 1985, 1987, 1991), one of the first social scientists to challenge the cultural deprivation theory.

Ogbu, a leading proponent of a controversial school of thought, argued that a critically important difference exists between immigrant minorities, people who moved to the United States because they sought a better life, and non immigrant, or "castelike" minorities, people whose status in American society was a result of slavery, conquest, or colonization. According to Ogbu, immigrant minorities such as Southeast Asians, Chinese, or Filipinos, for example, faced insurmountable barriers once they arrived in the country, but they tended to see those barriers as only temporary. However, castelike minorities, such as African Americans and Mexican Americans, not only experienced discrimination from the dominant White culture, but they also got caught up in a web of inferiority and self-defeat that discouraged them from living up to their potential. Castelike minorities did not regard their situation as temporary as they tended to interpret the discrimination against them as more or less permanent or institutionalized. According to Ogbu's theory (1987), immigrants believed that education was a golden opportunity for advancement, while African Americans and other castelike minorities did not trust the American educational system to educate African American children in the same way it educated White youth. Ogbu (1987) reasoned that mistrust stems from the exclusion of African Americans from high quality education received by Whites and this exclusion hampered the academic performance of African American children.

Ogbu proposed a cultural model to explain achievement within different cultural groups. In plural societies such as the United States, different segments of society, such as the dominant group and the ethnic or racial minorities, tended to have their own cultural models—their respective understandings of how their society or any particular institution worked and their respective understandings of their places in that working order. The cultural model of the dominant group, like the cultural model of a given minority group was neither better nor worse than other models. The cultural model existed to guide behaviors and interpretations (Ogbu, 1991).

In the domain of education, the cultural model of the dominant group coexisted with those of the various minorities. The cultural model of each group—minority as well as majority—existed to provide group members with the framework for interpreting educational events, situations, and experiences and to guide the behavior in school. Since differing cultural models provoked different behaviors, the cultural model of a particular group was connected to some degree with the relative academic success or failure of its members (Ogbu, 1991).

Ogbu (1974, 1985, 1987, 1991) proposed that findings from comparative research indicated that what distinguished minority groups who were achieving in school from others who were not was not that the former possessed a particular type of genetic endowment, nor that they inhabited a cultural environment which enabled them to develop the type of cognitive, linguistic, or motivational attributes characteristic of the middle-class members of the dominant group, nor that they attended schools that were inadequate. Rather, the more academically successful minorities differed from the less successful groups in the type of cultural model that guided them. What made a difference was the type of understanding they had in the workings of the larger society and of their place as minorities in that

working order. In addition, the minorities differed in their cultural models of their social realities because of differences in their histories (Ogbu, 1991).

Ogbu (1991) explained that there were two forms of historical forces which shaped the different cultural models of the minority groups who were relatively successful or unsuccessful in school. One was the initial terms of incorporation of these minorities into the society in which they existed; the other was the pattern of adaptive responses that the minorities made to subsequent treatment by members of the dominant group.

Immigrant and Involuntary Minorities

Minority groups have been incorporated into American society either voluntarily or involuntarily. Those who were incorporated voluntarily were immigrants. Immigrant *minorities* generally moved to the United States because they believed the move would lead to more economic well being, better overall opportunities or greater political freedom. These expectations continued to influence the way they perceived and responded to treatment by members of the majority culture. In contrast, non immigrant minorities, whom Ogbu designated *involuntary minorities*, were people who were brought to America through slavery, conquest, or colonization. They usually resented the loss of their former freedom and they perceived the social, economic, and political barriers against them as part of their undeserved oppression (Ogbu, 1991).

When confronted with collective problems, immigrant minorities and involuntary minorities tended to interpret them differently. Immigrants appeared to interpret the economic, political, and social barriers against them as more or less temporary problems which they would overcome with the passage of time, hard work, or more education. Furthermore, the immigrants had a positive dual frame of reference which allowed them to develop or maintain an optimistic view of their future. This frame of reference entailed comparing their present situation with their former situation back home. When they made this comparison, they found evidence which enabled them to believe they had found better opportunities in America for themselves and for their children. Another significant feature of the immigrants' response to barriers was they tended to interpret their exclusion from better jobs as attributable to the fact they were foreigners, they did not speak the language, or because they were educated elsewhere. From this interpretation, there emerged an immigrant folk theory of getting ahead through education. They believed the best weapon against job discrimination was a good education. They assumed their children would become armed with an American education and would be competitive in the American job market.

Involuntary minorities differed from the immigrants in their perceptions, interpretations, and responses to the majority culture. To begin with, involuntary minorities interpreted the economic, social, and political barriers they faced differently. Because they did not have a homeland with which to compare their present situation, they did not interpret low paying jobs as better than the situation of others like them in a foreign country. Instead, they compared their status with that of the members of the majority culture and concluded they were worse off than they ought to be simply because they belonged to a subordinate or disparaged minority group. Involuntary minorities had a negative dual frame of reference with respect to status mobility. Unlike immigrants, they did not see their situation as temporary. They tended to interpret the discrimination against them as permanent and institutionalized (Ogbu, 1991).

In discussing their folk theory of getting ahead, involuntary minorities often expressed the wish that they could get ahead through education and ability as members of the dominant culture did, but they knew they could not. They realized or had come to

believe that it required more than education, individual effort, or hard work to overcome the barriers against them in society's opportunity structure. Consequently, they developed a folk theory of getting ahead which differed from that of the members of the dominant group in some important respects. For example, their folk theory tends to stress the collective effort as providing the best chances for overcoming the opportunity barriers (Ogbu, 1991).

In summation, the cultural model of immigrant minorities and those of involuntary minorities proposed by Ogbu (1974, 1985, 1987, 1991) differed in the following key elements: (1) a frame of reference for comparing present status and future possibilities, (2) a folk theory of getting ahead, especially through education, (3) a sense of collective identity, (4) a cultural frame of reference for judging appropriate behavior and affirming group membership, and (5) an assessment of the extent to which one may trust members of the dominant group and the institutions they control, such as the schools. The different cultural models which resulted from these frameworks were learned by the children of the respective minorities and they helped to shape attitudes, knowledge, and competencies the children brought with them to school (Ogbu, 1991).

Immigrant Minorities and the Schools

The cultural frameworks affected the minorities orientations toward schooling and their responses to the educational system. The immigrants' dual status-mobility frame of reference, folk theory of success, and survival strategies led them to emphasize education for their children. There was a belief that school success determined later success in the job market. Parents advised their children: "Obey your teachers. Do your schoolwork. Stay out of trouble. You are there to learn and not to fight. Keep trying harder. Keep pushing yourself" (Ogbu, 1991, p. 17).

Although they recognized language and cultural differences the children experienced in school and discriminatory treatment by the school, the parents placed academic responsibility on the children themselves. Their language and cultural differences as well as their collective identity also enabled them to cross cultural and language boundaries and they learned successfully in school. The primary cultural differences of the immigrants initially caused problems both in relationships with teachers and other students and in the actual process of learning. But the problems were attributable to differences in cultural assumptions, and not to social opposition, and because they were not oppositional, they diminished over time (Ogbu, 1991). Immigrants saw the cultural and language differences as barriers to be overcome in order to achieve their long-range goals of employment, good wages, and other benefits. Overcoming these differences was not only essential for their social adjustment and academic success but it was non-threatening to their own culture, language, and identity. They generally adopted a philosophy of "accommodation without assimilation" (Gibson, 1991, p. 375). Though they did not give up their cultural beliefs, practices and language, they were willing to "play the classroom game by the rules" (Ogbu, 1991, p. 20) and tried to overcome difficulties in school because they believed that there would be benefits later.

Finally, the immigrants trusting relationship with the schools and with the members of the dominant group who controlled the schools also facilitated their school success. They tended to regard the public schools as offering an education which was far superior to what they knew of schools in their homeland. They also believed they were treated better in these schools than those back in the homeland. Even when they experienced prejudice and discrimination in school, they responded in a manner which did not discourage them from doing well in school. They rationalized the prejudice by saying they were guests in a foreign land and they had no choice but to tolerate the discrimination (Ogbu, 1991).

As a result of these perceptions, responses, or adaptations, the immigrant family and children adopted schooling strategies that enhanced academic success and promoted social adjustment. Parents communicated to children clear instrumental messages about education: it was a method of getting ahead in the new host country. Immigrant parents insisted that the children follow the school rules and the children responded positively to their parents message. The youngsters tried to develop and maintain serious academic attitudes, valued making good grades, respected school authority, followed rules of behavior, and invested a good deal of time in their studies (Ogbu, 1991).

Involuntary Minorities and the Schools

Like the immigrants, involuntary minorities faced economic and social barriers in society and at school. They encountered interpersonal and inter group problems as well as academic learning problems because of the cultural and language differences, but they were less able than the immigrant groups to overcome these problems. Therefore, they tended to experience more prolonged social adjustment problems and higher rates of school failure. While they generally verbalized a desire to achieve in school, there was less community and family pressure to achieve academically. As for peer groups, their collective orientation was actually the opposite of what it was among the immigrants, it was anti-academic success. Consequently, peer pressures among the involuntary minority students were used to discourage school success. There were complex community forces which made it difficult for these students to overcome their initial school problems.

The folk theory of getting ahead among involuntary minorities stressed survival strategies or ways of getting ahead other than education. These strategies affected the schooling of minority youth in a number of ways. They tended to generate attitudes and behaviors that were not necessarily conducive to good classroom teaching and learning. For example, as young people became familiar with survival strategies like hustling and pimping as well as drug dealing, their attitudes toward school were adversely affected. Another problem was that survival strategies competed seriously with school as a method of getting ahead, leading young people to channel their time and efforts into non-academic activities. This was especially true as they got older and became more aware of how some adults in their local communities made it with the mainstream culture without the mainstream school credentials and employment (Ogbu, 1991). Among African Americans, many young people viewed sports and entertainment, rather than education, as the way to get ahead, and their perceptions were reinforced by the media. African Americans were overrepresented in such lucrative sports as baseball, basketball, and football. Many of the athletic superstars earning between $1 million and $2 million were African American and had little education. While the number of such highly paid athletes were few, media exposure made them and the entertainers more visible to African American youngsters than African American lawyers, doctors, engineers, and scientists (Wong, 1987).

Under these circumstances, involuntary minority students, like their parents, expressed high interest in doing well in school and in obtaining good grades in school and the proper credentials for future employment in the mainstream culture, but they did not back up their aspirations with effort, even though they knew it required hard work and perseverance to succeed academically (Ogbu, 1977). The lack of serious academic effort seemed to increase as the students got older and became more aware of their own social reality.

Involuntary minorities emphasized the importance of education in getting ahead but this endorsement of school was not usually accompanied by effort. This discrepancy was attributable to the fact that historically involuntary minorities did not get the same opportunities to benefit from their education as members of the majority culture with respect

to jobs and wages. Eventually, the minorities came to believe that discrimination against them was institutionalized, and that it was not eliminated entirely by getting an education. For example, during his ethnographic fieldwork in Stockton, California, Ogbu (1977) found that African Americans complained they had to work twice as hard as the Whites or be twice as good if they competed for the same position. One result was that the minorities did not develop "effort optimism" toward academic work. That is, they did not develop a strong tradition of cultural know-how, hard work, and perseverance toward academic tasks. In Stockton, Ogbu (1977) found that parents told their children to get a good education in order to get a good job, yet the actual texture of the parents' lives with respect to their own jobs or underemployment conveyed a contradictory message which was powerful enough to undo this advice. Parents also discussed their frustration with "the system" as well as the problems of their relatives, friends, and neighbors in the presence of their children. The result was the children became disillusioned about their ability to succeed in adult life through education.

The deep distrust that involuntary minorities have for members of the majority culture and the schools they control added to the difficulties of minority students. While immigrant students compared the schools with those they had experienced back home, the involuntary minorities had no dual frame of reference. They compared their schools with those of the majority culture and concluded that theirs were inferior for no other reason than they were minorities. They believed their education was inferior and they continued to divert their emotion and energy in a continual quest for better schools and a better education. Skepticism about the schools was conveyed to the youngsters through their parents. Even minority school employees were responsible for passing down this message to the students. With this skeptical attitude permeating their environment, it was difficult for children of involuntary minorities to accept and follow the rules of the academic system and persevere with their studies (Ogbu, 1991).

In summation, Ogbu argued that the cultural models of the two types of minorities—immigrant and involuntary—enter differentially into the process of schooling and affect school achievement differently. Ogbu did not claim that all immigrant students were successful and all involuntary minorities were academically unsuccessful. What Ogbu described is what appeared to be dominant patterns for each type.

Intracultural Diversity of the Hispanic American

There are several different subgroups of Hispanics in America with similar yet sometimes, distinctive characteristics. Therefore, any literature review on Hispanic youth must account for these distinctions. Researchers of Hispanic students have commonly referred to the following subgroups: Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Central or South Americans. Three subgroups account for 80% of the Hispanic population. The largest group, Mexican Americans, accounts for 60.6% of the total. Puerto Ricans make up 15.1%, while Cubans account for 6.1%. Other groups including Central or South Americans and Hispanic persons identifying themselves as Latino or Hispanic account for 18.2% (Hyland, 1989). Waggoner (1992) reports that by the year 2040 the Hispanic population will comprise 18.1% of the entire United States population.

Each of the major subgroups has distinctive characteristics and experiences different degrees of success in American public schools. A point of differentiation among Hispanic Americans concerns regional residency. Mexican Americans reside primarily in California and Texas. Puerto Ricans reside primarily in New York, New Jersey, and other parts of the Northeast, while Cubans reside primarily in Florida (Hyland, 1989). Approximately 50% of the Puerto Rican population in the United States live in nine central cities (National Puerto Rican Coalition, 1992). However, Puerto Ricans are moving away from the greater

New York area to smaller cities and/or states. For instance, Alvarez (1992) reports that Puerto Ricans now comprise the largest Hispanic groups not only in New York but also in Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. The Hispanic population of South Central High School in Centerfield, consisted primarily of Puerto Rican youth, therefore this review of literature will focus on this subgroup.

Cultural Background of Puerto Ricans

Puerto Rican culture is a blend of three major racial heritages—Taino Indian, African, and Spanish. In the 15th century, with the arrival of the Spaniards, there were 40,000 copper colored Tainos on the island pursuing an agricultural way of life. The Tainos were almost extinguished after the arrival of the Spaniards who brought new diseases from Spain and forced them to work as slaves (Frenkel, 1992).

The near extinction of the Taino Indians led in the 1520s to the introduction of African slaves. The Spaniards converted the Africans to Christianity forcing them to forsake their own heritage and adopt the Spanish language and customs. Eventually, many slaves purchased their freedom and married Spanish settlers or Indians. Consequently, Puerto Ricans became a mixed race of people. Today, strong evidence of African culture can be found in Puerto Rican traditions, art, and music (Frenkel, 1992).

From the blending of these three cultures emerged a new generation of islanders—the native Puerto Ricans who regarded Puerto Rico as their mother country without strong ties to Spain. American citizens since 1917, Puerto Ricans have assimilated many of the attitudes and values of American society, yet were reluctant to give up the uniqueness of their own cultural identity. Despite the American influence, traditional Hispanic characteristics such as the glorification of the mother, concern for the extended family, the importance of the man as the central figure of the home, and the use of the Spanish language survived over several generations (Frenkel, 1992).

The unique status of Puerto Ricans in the United States has complicated rather than helped the adjustment of Puerto Ricans living on the mainland. As American citizens, they are free to migrate to the mainland in search of employment, educational opportunities, and a better life for their children. Unfortunately, they are coming at a time when the economy of the country is in decline and when automation has eliminated most of the jobs requiring unskilled laborers. Unable to find permanent employment and establish new roots on the mainland, Puerto Ricans move back and forth from the island to the mainland according to their needs. This mobility affects the family structure and the educational performance of the children (Frenkel, 1992).

The family, the most dominant institution in the Puerto Rican culture, undergoes severe changes on the mainland. In the traditional Puerto Rican culture, the man is the undisputed head of the household, occupying a position of strong authority governed by the norms of "hombre de respeto" (Lauria, 1964) and "machismo" (Bucchioni, 1972). The Puerto Rican woman is expected to be self-sacrificing, restricted to the home, dependent, chaste, and respectful of the male (Torres-Matrullo, 1980).

Puerto Rican males, coming from an agrarian background and lacking the technical skills necessary to compete in an industrialized society, experience difficulties finding adequate jobs. Puerto Rican women are forced to leave the home and find employment to help provide the economic necessities for the family. The women become more independent and assume new roles besides the traditional housewife (Frenkel, 1992). Puerto Rican families are most likely to be headed by females. In this respect, the National Puerto Rican Coalition (1992) indicates that in 1991: (a) 34% of Puerto Rican families

were headed by single women, (b) 70.3% of female-headed families were considered poor, and (c) 58% of the Puerto Rican children are poor. Unfortunately, Puerto Rican children are the poorest in the nation.

Each time a Puerto Rican family moves, the children disrupt their studies, fail to learn English or Spanish, and fall behind their peers in education. In the process of acculturation and learning English, young Puerto Ricans in American schools acquire values, attitudes, and sex-roles which are different from those of their parents. Puerto Rican youth are subject not only to the conflicts of values and behavior patterns that persist between Hispanic and mainland cultures, but they must seek status both within and outside the Hispanic group (Torres-Matrullo, 1980). Puerto Rican parents may believe they lose their control over their children while the Puerto Rican young people become torn between two languages and cultures (Frenkel, 1992).

Puerto Rican Families and Achievement

There are identifiable family factors that foster high achievement among Puerto Rican youth including parental education, high socioeconomic status, an educational environment at home, and parental involvement (Borges, 1975; Brown, Rosen, Hill, & Olivas, 1980; Torregrosa-Diaz, 1986). Researchers have also identified several factors affecting low achievement within the Puerto Rican population. Fitzpatrick (1987) and De La Rosa and Maw (1990) have found that discordance resulting from differences between mainstream and Puerto Rican cultures, poverty and low socioeconomic status, low parental education, and conflict between parents and children are all determinants of low achievement.

Ambert and Figler (1992) found that family life was one of the greatest sources of strength for Puerto Ricans. For some Puerto Rican families, living in the United States represents a stressful challenge for it involves the possibility of weakening the highly valued extended family network. Other important cultural and family values may be adversely affected. Although the traditional Hispanic family has an extended composition, the Puerto Rican family living in the United States presents a shift from this pattern According to Fitzpatrick (1987), four major types of Puerto Rican families can be identified: (a) the typical nuclear family (father-mother-children), (b) extended family (father-mother-children-relatives), (c) the extended nuclear family (father-mother-children-children of one mate's previous unions), and (d) the mother-based family (mother and children of one or more men reside in the home without the presence of a permanent husband and/or "compañero").

In a recent investigation of 28 Puerto Rican families, Ambert and Figler (1992) found that Puerto Rican families in the United States are distinguished by a strong sense of cultural identity as Puerto Ricans, a strong sense of family membership, with a strong caring element among members of the nuclear family, a desire for more education, a traditional view of gender roles, and feelings of burning out in relationships with others. These findings supported the well known Hispanic cultural value referred to as "familismo," which tends to emphasize interdependence over independence, affiliation over confrontation, and cooperation over competition (Falicov, 1982; Comas-Diaz, 1989).

Hispanic families are characterized by their focus on the collective. The needs of the family have greater priority than the needs of the individual. Another deeply rooted cultural value in the traditional Hispanic family is respeto (Lauria, 1964). Comas-Diaz (1989) points out that respeto refers to appropriate deferential behavior in interpersonal relationships, according to age, socioeconomic status, gender, and authority status. For example, elders in a Puerto Rican family deserve respeto from younger people and the same is expected of children from their parents. However, in North American society, the culture

nurtures self-reliance, and aggressive, competitive, and verbally inquisitive behaviors among young people. These traits appear to contrast with the traditional Hispanic values and for Puerto Rican parents, these behaviors in their children are considered disrespectful (Figler, 1979).

Perrine (1989) indicated that the "dynamic of families in the Hispanic culture is a vital force and must be considered" (p. 15) in planning the academic experiences of high ability Hispanic students. Perrine (1989) suggested that this same dynamic needs to be inclusive of parents themselves, for parental support is a critical factor in determining whether or not young people's capabilities are valued and nurtured. Perrine (1989) noted that several factors, characteristic of the dynamic of Hispanic families, have the potential to mitigate against the nurturance of giftedness in school. They include family structure, parental view of the educational process, and the family view of the general value of education and school success.

Perrine (1989) indicated the structure of the Hispanic family is critical with respect to role modeling. Male dominance in the family setting does not encourage a bright youngster's tendency for independent thought and behavior. For example, in a Hispanic family, children are embraced and cared for, but infrequently included in family decisions. Perrine (1989) also noted that due to their limited experience with education, parents of Hispanic students do not perceive participation in "school life" as their domain. Many Hispanic families, whether they have lived in the United States for generations, or recently arrived, reflect a different view of parental association with the school and the duties of the teacher than do Anglo-American families. Hispanic parents have enormous respect for teachers and they do not feel they, as non experts in education, should make educational decisions. An additional complicating factor is that sometimes a communication problem develops in the parent-child relationship when the parents conduct their lives primarily in Spanish and their children develop a predominant facility in English. As a child matures, less conferring and sharing occurs about issues or decisions a young person faces. The family support system, which was previously so important, becomes less valued by the youngster (Perrine, 1989).

The view of education held by Hispanic parents may differ from that of the school with the youngster being torn between the two value systems. Ruiz (1989) explained this problem:

> Hispanics conceive of and define the term, 'education' much more broadly than do most who speak English in this society. To be *educado* goes far beyond school, or may not involve school at all; it means to be well mannered, respectful, considerate, and knowledgeable about practical things. In schools these may be recognized as admirable qualities, but not as talents. For their part, Hispanics may resist school programs that are merely cognitive in orientation—programs, in their terms that may add to one's 'schooling', but not one's 'education.' (p. 62)

Thus, considering the value system of Hispanic families is crucial in better understanding the needs of Puerto Rican students. Some research has taken this into account. For example, research examining ways in which families influenced the achievement of their children includes studies of Hispanic families. A study by Soto (1986) investigated the differences on the home environment of higher and lower achieving Puerto Rican children. By using a revised version of the *Majoribanks Family Environmental Schedule*, Soto found statistically significant differences between the two groups regarding press for achievement, concern for the use of English, and parental reinforcement of aspirations. Soto (1986, 1988) found a link between home environment and achievement in school. The families of high achievers made it apparent to their children that reading was

enjoyable and important, higher goals were realistic and attainable, and learning and school were important.

Hine (1991) examined several family factors that fostered high achievement among gifted Puerto Rican students. Her findings supported Soto's assertions, and Hine identified additional factors that were crucial in nurturing high achievement. Role models outside the family, outstanding teachers, consistently high teacher expectations and an intrinsic drive to succeed proved to be essential factors to the high achieving Puerto Rican high school students in Hine's research.

One of the most striking issues regarding culturally diverse students and their educational experiences is the issue concerning the type of school environment and its effect on their performance. Toles, Schulz and Rice (1986) conducted a study of 63 public schools in Chicago regarding school attendance and dropout risk. This study revealed that within these schools, the actual dropout rates varied given the composition of the students in the schools. Therefore, the researchers postulated that the types of schools attended by students helped them to succeed or simply silenced them.

Investigating school and classroom environments provided researchers with a better understanding of why urban youngsters may have academic difficulties. Fraser (1992) found that classroom environments advocating learning were endowed with a high degree of cohesiveness, satisfaction, goal direction, and low disorganization and friction. These classroom qualities supported learning and promoted higher levels of achievement. Ramsden (1992) found that positive and supportive classroom climate were associated with higher levels of achievement. According to Ramsden, a positive learning climate enhanced intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm for learning.

Hispanic youngsters commonly attend schools that are considered poor, highly segregated and plagued with high dropout rates (Orum, 1986; Orfield, 1988). This type of school environment is not considered conducive to learning and in these schools, achievement levels were low among Hispanic students. Several research teams (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Espinosa & Ochoa, 1986; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987) suggested that low achievement levels in large, urban, segregated schools were explained in part by the poor school climate and constant discipline problems among teachers and students. Alvarez (1983) carried out a study investigating the correlates of differential achievement among 98 inner-city Puerto Rican students and discovered that school was the major contributor to achievement among low-income Puerto Rican children. Alvarez found the impact of schools was higher than the impact of family background or personal traits.

In impoverished, segregated school environments, low achieving Hispanic students usually demonstrated low attendance rates and disciplinary problems. These students were more likely to become chronic underachievers and to drop out of school (Vélez, 1989). Ortiz (1988) claimed that Hispanic students were more likely to have poor schooling environments that fostered poor academic performance and were taught by teachers who set low expectation levels for students and perceived Hispanic students as slow learners (Brown, 1986; Melendez, 1986). Such a negative situation was likely to hinder the educational experiences and achievement of Hispanic youth in urban environments.

In the case of Puerto Ricans, Walsh (1991) asserted that a mismatch existed between the academic environment and the daily lives of the Hispanic youngsters. For these students, school had little relation to the rest of their lives. Their learning experiences were perceived as irrelevant and unrewarding and they developed poor attitudes and low motivation which in turn fostered low achievement. Walsh argued they were often at risk of being labeled "underachiever," "emotionally disturbed," or "behavior problems." Passow

(1972) indicated one reason for low success among high ability Hispanic students is that they are usually placed in programs that focus on developing abilities valued by the majority culture. In such programs, Hispanic students have to work twice as hard to succeed, overcoming obstacles of differing value systems and languages, behaviors and inadequate academic preparation. Perrone and Aleman (1983) contended that children who grow up in minority subcultures have an achievement orientation different from that of children from the dominant culture. They further indicated that children of color attribute any success to luck and failure to personal inadequacy, and therefore tend to not believe people who try to convince them of their abilities. Ramirez (1972) proposed that the schools must develop "culturally democratic learning environments" to nurture minority students so they can flourish without being alienated from their respective groups. In such a learning environment high ability students are provided with real world problems that are culturally meaningful to the youngsters involved.

Puerto Rican Students, Personality, and Academic Achievement

Academic achievement has been connected to several personal characteristics and behaviors. In this respect, Klein (1986) stated that academic excellence derived not only from intellect, but also from a blending of interests, motives, diligence, self-confidence, and other personal and/or psychological properties. Clark (1983) noted that students who are fairly autonomous, independent, assertive, highly structured, and hold a positive view of themselves are more likely to develop their capabilities and potentialities. Furthermore, students with a sense of power in intellectual matters usually develop higher levels of motivation and achievement. Schunk (1989) explained that students with a high sense of academic efficacy show more persistence, effort, and intrinsic motivation in their learning and academic performance.

A study of factors reversing the pattern of underachievement among gifted students revealed that a positive concept of self and attitude toward achievement contributes to the reversal of underachievement. It was important for children to perceive success in school as a source of personal satisfaction rather than a way of pleasing others (Emerick, 1991).

Nevertheless, several researchers have focused on assessing the psychological traits of students who are failing to achieve in school. Most of this research involved minority students and poor White children. Holliday (1985) argued that most of the literature on minority students explains low achievement levels with cognitive and linguistic deficits. He adds that other non-cognitive factors such as low needs for achievement, lack of self-direction, low self-esteem, and/or difficulty in delaying gratification have been identified as contributors to children's poor performance. Yet, research on African American children's achievement demonstrated that personal variables such as value of education and the individual's perception of the utility of academic work have a more powerful influence than self-concept and/or degree of anxiety. In this aspect, Kerry (1981) argued that a belief that school learning is valuable rather than a waste of time is essential for academic achievement. On the other hand, Hispanic students displayed greater levels of anxiety and a stronger tendency to attribute poor performance to lack of ability (Willig, Harnisch, Hill, & Maehr, 1983). Hispanic students appeared to experience difficulty recognizing their abilities and talents and the lack of educational opportunities to develop their abilities further complicates the problem.

In a study of African American, White, and Hispanic children attending elementary schools in Chicago (Stevenson, Chen, & Uttal, 1990), the researchers found that the achievement levels of these children were not substantially different, and that their beliefs about achievement are similar to those associated with higher levels of achievement. For example, in this study, African American and Hispanic, as well as White children, displayed

high expectations about their future success, initiative, self-discipline, self-direction, high self-esteem, and high desires for achievement. These results are striking because the later picture of students in middle and high school portrayed a pervasive school failure among minority children. Stevenson et al. (1990) proposed that something must occur after the elementary school years that destroys children's enthusiasm and opportunities to succeed in high school and college.

The research examining Puerto Rican children's personalities or psychological traits is sparse. Very little research was found comparing personality and/or psychological traits with Puerto Rican children's achievement. Studies done in this area mostly focus on academic self-concept and/or self-esteem. Very few studies address achievement motivation and locus of control among Puerto Rican children.

It has been suggested that Puerto Rican children on the mainland display a low self-concept (Meléndez, 1978; Prewitt-Díaz, 1983) affecting the likelihood that their potential will be realized. Rodríguez (1992) asserts that most at risk and dropout Puerto Rican students exhibit a low self-concept. Low self-concept is often associated with poor self-image and lack of self-confidence which, in turn, leads to disturbance in the individual's behaviors.

Another important psychological feature of Puerto Rican students was their motivational orientation. Motivation has been linked with academic learning and/or achievement (Uguroglu &Walberg, 1979). Particularly, intrinsic motivation is positively related to academic achievement (Gottfried, 1985). In this respect, Soto (1986) reported that findings on high achieving Puerto Rican students were consistent with previous studies. Soto stated that high achieving Puerto Rican students tended to have an intrinsic orientation and indicates that low achieving Puerto Rican students are inclined to be extrinsically oriented. This means that the students are likely to rely on the teacher's judgment, comments, help, and guidance. An interesting note is that most Puerto Ricans considered teachers as authority figures. As a result, pleasing the teachers and relying on them are considered to be positive attributes.

Tapia (1992) compared the motivational orientation of Anglo and Puerto Rican children from 10 to 12 years of age. Tapia's study revealed the following unexpected findings: (a) individualistic, cooperative, and competitive orientations exist in both populations; (b) Anglo students are slightly more individualistic oriented than Puerto Rican students; (c) Puerto Rican children are slightly more cooperative oriented than Anglo children; and (d) Anglo children are slightly more competitive oriented than Puerto Rican children. Although Puerto Rican students were characterized by their cooperative orientation, some students are apparently moving toward a more individualistic orientation. Tapia (1992) wrote, "These unexpected findings raise the possibility that the culture of Puerto Rican children living on the mainland may have diffused somewhat" (p. 122).

There is indeed a connection between personality traits and students' academic achievement. However, researchers must be careful in making generalizations. Uniqueness can be overlooked and, as a result, children are at risk of being misunderstood, even isolated. Further research is needed regarding the personality of Puerto Rican students as most of the research done concerning this topic is limited to self-esteem and motivation.

Hispanics, Puerto Ricans, and Community

Studies on the influence of community on student achievement are sparse. According to Valencia (1991), the community has a powerful influence on student achievement. The community involves the environment outside the school and the family

and includes social institutions such as churches, community organizations, labor markets and peers, among other elements. Contemplating community appears to be a critical need in the current study because the meaning of actions and behaviors "is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows" (Blumer, 1969). Moreover, "the culture of each group [is] inextricably bound up with the social life of their particular communities" (Blumer, 1969).

For language minority students, the community is an integral part of their lives (Cummins, 1988). Moll (1992) believes that the students' community represents a resource of enormous importance for educational change and improvement among language minority students, especially Hispanic students. Hispanic families usually establish close linkages to various social networks such as churches, community organizations, other households, and friends. It is a matter of survival since these social networks facilitate forms of economic help and labor cooperation which avoid major expenses, job placement, and child care among others. These community/social networks are considered critical contexts for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and information as well as cultural values and norms (Moll, 1992). Consequently, community networks represent a social and intellectual resource that complement schools.

Although efforts are being dedicated to integrate the community in the schooling experience of language minority students, many U. S. schools still exclude the personal and communal reality of these children. Walsh (1991) acknowledged this situation and wrote: "Teachers often presume that the community holds no place in the classroom, that students somehow forget who they are outside school and conform to Anglo norms and expectations while within" (p. 114). The children, their families, and community become obviously negated, ignored, subordinated, and misunderstood. Children's interests, motivations in school, and hopes of a better future are relatively eliminated. The assumption is that there is no reason to bother about being a "good" student or finishing school. After all, the relative social and economic rewards are known to be lower for them than for either African Americans or Whites. For example, unemployment is high for Hispanic graduates; it is much higher for Hispanics whose schooling was concluded before high school graduation (Pearl, 1991).

In 1989, Fernández, Henn-Reinke, and Petrovich conducted a study of at risk and dropout Hispanic students who were primarily Puerto Ricans. An interesting finding of this study was that students openly admitted that friends and peers may be an impediment to success in school. This study also revealed that Puerto Rican youngsters depend on support and guidance for academic success not only from parents and relatives but from neighbors and friends in the community as well. Ford (1992) proposed that social forces such as discrimination and prejudice influence the motivation and academic achievement of African American students. These issues regarding Hispanic students have been addressed under the topic of schooling.

Factors Contributing to Achievement

Other social scientists attempted to explain the lack of school success for young people of color by examining social and psychological factors, family and community factors, as well as educational programmatic factors. They provided a multitude of theories regarding why minority students did not achieve academically (Trueba, 1988). The relationship between teacher expectations and academic achievement was also of wide-scale interest among researchers. The bulk of studies which suggested that teacher attitudes and expectations affected a youngster's school performance began to appear in the 1960s and

early 1970s when Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) published their now classic study entitled *Pygmalion in the Classroom*. The results of the study confirmed the experimenter's prediction in that the teachers in the study were especially attentive to students who were expected to show intellectual promise. These students were often treated in a more encouraging manner and teachers showed increased tolerance and patience with them.

Warner and colleagues (1944) found that motivation to learn was squashed in urban classrooms where minority students from lower socioeconomic levels were often discriminated against because they did not have the "symbols or behaviors valued in school" (p. 159). Shade (1982) theorized that diversity in task and academic competence found among African American youngsters was precipitated by differences in culturally induced lifestyles and perspective rather than ability differences. Shade suggested that African American children may not learn in the same ways and may develop rather diverse cognitive strategies for processing information. Shade's examination of the literature suggested that successful functioning within the school context required cognitive strategies described as sequential, analytical, or object-oriented. An examination of the culture, lifestyle, and world view of African American students, however, revealed strategies designed to foster survival and therefore tended to be rather universalistic, intuitive, and very person-oriented.

Steppe-Jones (1986) suggested that the school was the major agency for preparing high ability minority students for productive citizenship, and the key element was the teacher's ability to recognize and support the student's potential. Crocker (1987) maintained the influence of social factors on underachievement was underestimated and suggested the problem of underachievement among African American students was due to social forces such as discrimination, prejudice, and low socioeconomic status. In a related study examining achievement levels and self-concept, Mboya (1986) investigated the relationships among global self-concept, academic self-concept, and academic achievement of African American high school students and found a significant positive relationship between academic self-concept and achievement. Mboya posited that African American adolescents' orientation toward school was different from the way they felt about themselves and that African American adolescents viewed academic achievement as a separate activity which did not greatly influence their feelings of "self." Mboya's work suggested the enhancement of global self-concept was not a potent intervention for promoting academic improvement for African American youth.

Resilience

In contrast to theories addressing factors and influences of underachievement, the introduction of resilience theory attempts to explain academic achievement among students subjected to negative psychological and environmental situations. According to Rutter (1981), resilience is "the term used to describe the positive pole of individual differences in people's response to stress and adversity" (p. 316). Resilience is not a fixed attribute in individuals and the successful negotiation of psychological risks at one point in a person's life does not guarantee that the individual will not react adversely to other stresses when the situation is different. Rutter (1981) stated, "If circumstances change, resilience alters" (p. 317).

Rutter continued with a discussion of four main processes that protect individuals against risk and enhance the development of resilience. The four protective mechanisms include: (1) reduction of risk impact by altering either the risk or exposure to the risk, (2) reduction of negative chain reactions that follow risk exposure, (3) establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and (4) opening up of opportunities.

Werner (1984) addressed the topic of resilient children with regard to biological and environmental risks that increase the likelihood of development problems. In conjunction with the research of others, Werner (1984) described four central characteristics shared by resilient children that include:

(1) an active, evocative approach toward solving life's problems, enabling them to negotiate successfully an avoidance of emotionally hazardous experiences;
(2) a tendency to perceive their experiences constructively, even if they cause pain or suffering;
(3) the ability, from infancy on, to gain other people's positive attention; and
(4) a strong ability to use faith in order to maintain a positive vision of a meaningful life. (O'Connell-Higgins, 1983; in Werner, 1984, p. 69)

The importance of resiliency research and gifted education is demonstrated in Bland, Sowa, and Callahan's (1994) discussion of characteristics of giftedness and resilience. The authors caution against making the assumption that "all gifted children are resilient individuals or that all resilient individuals are gifted" (p. 77). However, developing an understanding regarding resiliency and children with special needs may play a role in the identification of gifted behaviors among these populations. For example, underrepresented populations of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds or limited English proficient backgrounds may benefit from heightened sensitivity by teachers, counselors, and administrators who "can identify specific characteristics of resilience in these children" in which "the resilience characteristics may serve as possible indicators of a child's abilities" (p. 79).

Recently, two models have been proposed dealing with resilience. Wolin and Wolin (1992) described resilience as the ability of some young people to take charge of their own learning, their own lives, and to survive anything. Their resilience theory is: ". . . the capacity to rise above adversity and forge lasting strengths in the struggle. It is the means by which children of troubled families can rebound from hardship and emerge as strong and healthy adults, able to lead gratifying lives albeit with some scars to show for their experience" (p. 36). Wolin and Wolin offered an alternative to the Damage Model which advocates inter-generational transmission of risk factors. The alternative, the Challenge Model, offers a more balanced perspective of their past. Characteristics that typify survivors are insight, independence, relationships, initiative, humor, and creativity.

McMillan and Reed (1994) also discuss the importance of understanding how resiliency promotes success in students and suggests an alternative resiliency model which denotes how resiliency can explain why some at-risk students are successful. The elements of resiliency presented in the study are individual attributes, positive use of time, family factors, and school factors. McMillan and Reed (1994) describe resilient at-risk students who "have a set of personality characteristics, dispositions, and beliefs that promote their academic success regardless of their backgrounds or current circumstances" (p. 139). These students have a strong sense of self-efficacy and feel they are successful because they choose to be. Resilient students have a psychological support system both in and out of school that provides encouragement to them. They use their time positively to "provide [for themselves] a sense of support, success, and recognition" (p. 139). Trusting relationships with adults are important to resilient at-risk students for support and encouragement.

The importance of making positive changes for young people in inner-city environments is a serious issue. To do so, urban educators will have to further investigate resilience research and create supportive educational environments if students of all colors are to reach higher levels of academic achievement. Efforts to bring about these changes

must be monumental when we consider "the great number of youngsters whose day-today school experience is nothing short of an educational and [a] psychological disaster" (Renzulli, 1973, p. 4). And the need to examine, in particular, the experience of high ability students was discussed by Renzulli (1973) over twenty years ago.

> There can be little doubt that our nation's largest untapped source of human intelligence and creativity is found among the vast numbers of individuals in the lower socioeconomic levels . . . an invaluable natural resource is being wasted daily by a system of education that has shut its eyes and turned its back on [these children]. The by-products of this waste are evident in unprecedented urban turmoil, in unemployment and underemployment, in rising crime and delinquency rates, and most importantly, in the human despair that accompanies thwarted expression and creativity. (p. 3)

Underachievement

Student performance that falls noticeably short of potential is bewildering, especially for young people with high ability. The literature describing the problem of academic underachievement among high ability students dates back to Conklin (1940) who described high IQ students who were failing. In spite of five decades of research, underachievement among high ability students is still viewed as a major problem. The gifted underachiever has been described as "one of the greatest social wastes of our culture" (Gowan, 1955, p. 247). According to the 1990 needs assessment survey conducted by The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, the problem of underachievement was identified as the number one concern among educators of high ability students (Renzulli, Reid, & Gubbins, 1990).

Some students underachieve or fail in school for obvious reasons: excessive absences from school, poor performance, disruptive behavior, low self-esteem, family problems, and poverty. In 1992, researchers for Phi Delta Kappa conducted a study involving 21,706 students from 276 schools which identified 34 risk factors of students who fail in school in five categories: personal pain, academic failure, family tragedy, family socioeconomic situation, and family instability. Included in the personal pain category were student factors: suspension from school, attempted suicide, pregnancy, drugs, alcohol, arrest records, abuse, and family factors such as family member who used drugs, and alcoholic parents. The category of academic failure included factors such as low grades in school, failed courses, overage in grade, retained in grade, excessive absences, low self-esteem, referred to special education, and low reading scores. Factors in the family tragedy category included parents ill, death of parent, parent lost job last year, friend died last year, student ill last year, and sibling died last year. Elements that influenced the family socioeconomic situation category include father was unemployed or held a low level job, father had not graduated from high school, mother was unemployed or held a low level job, mother had not graduated from high school, parent's attitude toward education was negative, and English was not the language spoken in the home. The category of family instability included factors such as a student came from broken home, moved frequently, changed schools frequently, and parents divorced last year. The major finding of this study was that the risk factors of these students are pervasive in each student in that "children who hurt, hurt all over. Children who fail, often fail in everything they do. Risk is pervasive. If a student is at risk in one area, that student is very likely to be at risk in many other areas" (Frymier, 1992, p. 5).

Little research has been conducted on high ability students who are at risk, although the problem of academic underachievement among high ability youth is believed to be widespread (Gowan, 1957; Raph, Goldberg, & Passow, 1966; Renzulli, Reid, & Gubbins, 1990). Estimates of the numbers of underachievers range from two to ten percent of high school students according to Zilli (1971), while Pirozzo (1982) suggests that one half of high-ability students underachieve. The National Commission on Excellence in Education reported in *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983), "Over half the population of gifted students do not match their tested ability with comparable achievement in school" (p. 8). Underachievement in school is clearly an issue of great importance for young people, their parents, and society, despite difficulties in defining and assessing the construct (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992).

The conceptual and operational definitions of underachievement are complicated and problematic. Essentially, most people agree on the commonplace, general definition of underachievement as it applies to education: "the underachiever is a young person who performs more poorly in school than one would expect on the basis of his mental abilities" (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992, p. 2). This conceptual definition represents a discrepancy between the actual and expected performance, but researchers need greater specificity, and complications may arise, for example, in categorizing the different types of underachievers.

Since the Soviet launching of Sputnik in 1957, and the resulting concern over U.S. technological ability, the public and educational critics alleged that the nation was not doing enough educationally for its most capable students, many of whom were performing at mediocre levels in school. Social, political, and educational attention was focused on the gifted underachiever—the student of superior ability who academically performed much more poorly than was expected (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992). Generally, current studies of underachievement focus on the high ability students who underachieve. Therefore, it should not be surprising that the early definition of underachiever, which probably has been cited more frequently than any other, focused on gifted underachievers. Shaw and McCuen (1960) provided educators with that definition, "the underachiever with superior ability is one whose performance, as judged either by grades or achievement test scores, is significantly below his high measured or demonstrated aptitudes or potential for academic achievement" (p. 15).

The label "gifted underachiever" implies that it is important to recognize a learner's level of potential. While this idea was implied in conclusions of many researchers, Scruggs and Cohn (1983) stated it directly. A belief in the need to recognize a student's level of potential provided a rationale for the idea that appropriate academic performance would constitute the fulfillment of that potential. Therefore, the belief that we must foresee a student's potential before discovering whether underachievement is present evolved (Lukasic et al., 1992).

Although there appears to be no agreement on a precise definition of gifted underachievement, most researchers would agree that a general description involves a discrepancy between intellectual potential and academic performance. Most commonly, the bright underachiever is thought to be a youngster whose high intelligence test scores are coupled with low academic performance (Lukasic et al., 1992). Many researchers adopt a definition of gifted underachievement which suggests that a student's IQ score should predict a level of high academic achievement (Arkava, 1969; Bachtold, 1969; Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982; Gowan, 1957; Hall, 1983; Kanoy, Johnson, & Kanoy, 1980; Karnes et al., 1961; Khoury & Apel, 1977; Passow & Goldberg, 1958; Pirozzo, 1982; Rimm, 1984; Thiel & Thiel, 1977). The IQ scores used in predicting achievement ranged from 110 and above to 140 and above, and most researchers suggested the use of IQ scores that fell in the 125 to 130 range as the minimum to be considered gifted or possessing high ability.

In most published studies, researchers used a variety of measures of intelligence which resulted in scores that were not necessarily equivalent, therefore some researchers relied on a percentile ranking of tests to be indicative of high ability. For example, Broedel et al. (1960) administered the California Test of Mental Maturity and considered the top 10% to be gifted. Other researchers did not rely on IQ tests or percentiles, but instead used raw data and grade equivalencies and again, cutoffs for identification as gifted varied.

Even more difficult than assessing a learner's potential was the task of evaluating at what level of academic performance underachievement should be labeled. Simply performing below average for the current grade level appeared to be the most commonly applied standard (Finney & Van Dalsem, 1969; Fitzpatrick, 1978; Morrow & Wilson, 1961; Perkins, 1976; Purkey, 1969). Similar to the wide range of IQs and other measures of intellect, the definition of low academic achievement ranges from learners who are failing a grade level (Amatea & Fabrick, 1981) to a student who is performing less than one and a half grade levels above the current grade level norms (Fearn, 1982). Rather than targeting a particular school year, some researchers regard as gifted underachievers those students who evidence a long standing, and therefore *chronic*, pattern of academic underachievement (Lukasic et al., 1992).

With the disparity of definitions of gifted underachievement, the original question remains: What constitutes gifted underachievement? Some authors avoid the problem entirely by assuming that the concept is so well understood that no definition is necessary, while other researchers insist that the definition of underachievement must be agreed upon and should be precise, functional, and take into consideration a variety of complex factors (Lukasic et al., 1992).

Underachievement in Different Forms

A distinction between chronic and situational underachievement was offered three decades ago (Fine, 1967; Fliegler, 1957; Miller, 1961; Shaw & McCuen, 1960). A "temporary" or "situational underachiever" is one whose academic performance temporarily declines below what is expected, often in response to personal or situational stress, such as a divorce, a particular teacher, or a family move. In contrast, a "chronic underachiever" displays the underachievement pattern consistently over a long period of time (Whitmore, 1980). Unfortunately, no specific length of time has distinguished chronic from temporary or situational underachievement (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992).

Shaw and McCuen (1960) referred to students who do not perform at a level with teacher expectations even though their grades and mental ability scores are not discrepant. These "hidden underachievers" may be, for example, students who score poorly on ability tests and perform poorly in school, but display verbal fluency and an extent of knowledge that convince teachers that they are more capable than either their scores or their grades reflect. Other high ability students may achieve high grades, but teachers nevertheless judge them as capable of performing better. These "hidden underachievers" are discovered only in studies that include teacher judgments as well as test scores or grades to define underachievement (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992).

A distinction between "general" and "specific underachievers" has emerged (Whitmore, 1980) as an outgrowth of the rise in concern over specific learning disabilities. Whitmore (1980) divided the domain of underachievement into three parts: specific subject, particular area, and general. She observed that some students were underachievers only with respect to a single subject or an ability. A student might be exceptional in science, but perform no better in science classes than in other subject areas; or a student might perform well in algebra or foreign languages for what might simply be motivational reasons. Some

students underachieve only in a somewhat broader content area, such as mathematics or language arts. As educational interest continues to focus on curricula in particular areas, more attention will be paid to such underachievers, although anecdotal reports by investigators searching for young people who underachieve in one subject area suggest that specific underachievement may be unusual (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992).

Shortly after the concept of underachievement was proposed, a distinction was made between "non learners" and "non producers" (Kessler, 1963). Non learners include children with identifiable learning disabilities who score better on measures of mental performance than they perform in a classroom. On the other hand, non producers display no learning problems, yet perform more poorly in school than would be expected on the basis of their ability scores. Their lack of performance is associated with motivational factors. In general, the literature on underachievement is more concerned with non producers than non learners; definitions of underachievement may implicitly or explicitly exclude young people who suffer from a learning problem (McCall, Evahn & Kratzer, 1992).

Scholars have suggested further individual differences within the underachievement category, describing different types or syndromes of underachievers on the basis of their behaviors and presumed dynamics. Roth (1970) distinguished three types of underachievers. The first type is the "neurotic underachiever" who is preoccupied with his relationship with parents and suffers from much anxiety and guilt because of the problem. The second type exhibits the "non achievement syndrome," choosing to make no effort and therefore failing. The third type Roth describes is the "adolescent reaction," which consists of extreme independence seeking and attempting to do everything parents oppose.

Pecaut (1979) outlined four types of underachievers. "Trust seekers" are lonely, isolated, withdrawn, impulsive, and emotionally explosive youngsters. "Approval seekers" are indecisive and may try to fulfill the expectations of teachers and parents, but many stop attempting to do so. These youngsters have serious test anxiety, need constant praise, and fear authority. "Dependency seekers" are rather uninterested in certain basic subjects in school; they are ambivalent to authority, passive-aggressive, and socially gregarious. They also blame others for their failures. The final type, "independence seekers," feel conflict over their independence and dependence from parents. They value the opposite of whatever is emphasized by parents and others adults, and often are hostile toward adult authority figures.

Whitmore (1980) distinguished three types similar to those described by Roth (1970). She suggested that three out of four underachievers are *aggressive*—disruptive, talkative, clowning in class, rebellious, and hostile. In contrast, the *withdrawn* underachievers are bored and uninterested, and do not attempt to participate in class. Whitmore's third type is a *combination* of the aggressive and withdrawn—unpredictable and constantly vacillating between aggression and withdrawal. These students have inconsistent work habits, may often be perceived as immature and may be popular, aggressive, or withdrawn.

When Does Underachievement Begin?

It is commonly reported that underachievement begins during the late elementary grades, certainly by junior high school, and that it begins earlier for males than for females (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992). As early as 1960, Shaw and McCuen found that for males, high school underachievers had lower grade averages than their comparison groups of achievers from the first grade onward, and the difference was significant by the third grade. The divergence continued to increase from grade to grade thereafter, primarily

because of the continual decline in the grade average for underachievers. The underachieving high school females in their study, however, were actually better, but not significantly so, than achievers in grade point average through the fifth grade, at which point the underachievers began to decline, differing significantly by ninth grade. This study has been interpreted as showing that male high school underachievers can be identified in early elementary school, but female high school underachievement does not begin until junior high or early high school. This may suggest that female students underachieve for different reasons than male students.

The age of onset of underachievement, then becomes a question of predictability or stability of underachievement, which depends on the age it begins, the definition of underachievement and the method of assessing stability. For example, in one of the few longitudinal studies of underachievement, Kowitz and Armstrong (1961) calculated discrepancy scores separately at the third, sixth, and ninth grades. Little consistency was found in identifying underachievers from grade to grade, and patterns of underachievement seemed to be related to the particular academic subject involved.

Whatever the technical issues may be, the assertion that underachievement begins in elementary school may be meaningful to educators because the problem becomes more noticeable to them at this time (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992). For example, homework increases in upper elementary and junior high school, and students who refuse to complete homework or do it so with little care or effort are easily identified. Some youngsters, especially gifted, may achieve easily and without effort through the early years in school, but give up when they meet the challenge of strenuous mental effort, real production, or increased homework, and are labeled underachievers (Flowers, Horsman, & Schwartz, 1982).

McCall, Evahn, and Kratzer (1992) raise an important question regarding the stability of underachievement and its resulting problem in defining underachievement. They state:

> The very fact that underachievers do not learn as much in school as would be expected will mean that their mental ability may decline to match their grades, at which point they will no longer be underachieving. Prolonged underachievement, then, may be unusual, not because of lack of stability in the psychological characteristics of such students, but because their mental ability has not been nurtured by effort in school. (p. 18)

Causes and Contributors

Underachievement is thought to be a behavior or a pattern of behaviors. What would cause a capable learner to engage in behaviors which mask ability? No definitive answers exist to this perplexing question, but several theories and some speculation are used as a background for studies. Research concerning underachievement among gifted students has examined many possible causes including the following: biology, environment, self pressure, school pressure, peer pressure, parental pressure, boredom with school, and inappropriate teaching methods (Lukasic et al., 1992).

Compton (1982) suggested there are two biological factors which contribute to underachievement in bright adolescents. During the early teens, there is a plateau period where the brain may reach a pause in growth. During this period, there may be a slow down of mental activity. Prior to this lull period, there appears to be a growth spurt in which greater nutrition is required, and thus leaves less for mental activity. Consequently, at this growth spurt, learners may experience some lessened ability to absorb knowledge and to

think, experiencing a burn-out period due to the increased demands of the body. However, since so many students continue at high levels of achievement during this period, many researchers question the brain growth theory.

Other researchers suggest an earlier onset of underachieving behaviors, referring to problems of the youngster as possible causes of underachievement. Shaw and Brown (1957) claimed that bright underachievers might have personality characteristics or problems which cause underachievement to surface. In addition, school pursuits may not be as rewarding to the youngster as interests outside of school (Fine, 1977). Purkey (1969) and Pirozzo (1982) also suggested that another potential cause may be personal adjustment problems. Because of the youngster's intelligence, it is often assumed that adjustment problems will be easily solved. Many assume that because some young people are so bright, they can cope with anything. With no help from caring adults, they often retreat, lose energy, and fail to achieve at their expected level (Perkins, 1976).

Peer reactions may also play an important role in causing underachievement among bright students. If youngsters receive high grades, they might believe that their peers will not like or respect them, and desiring to be socially accepted, bright young people may hide their abilities (Ramos, 1975). This is especially true during adolescence when young people want to be popular and fit in with the peer group; accordingly, many bright students may underachieve to identify with other average students (Compton, 1982). A lack of participation in sports and a heavy concentration in academic pursuits may cause the youngster to be teased; forcing the bright student to conform to the perceived peer values (Rimm, 1984). Purkey (1969) suggested that some young people may not know how to relate to others, experience inadequate social relationships and withdraw to underachievement. Fein (1958) suggested that negative societal attitudes toward intelligence and scholastic achievement are a cause for lack of motivation in able learners.

Many researchers point to the school environment as the place where bright students lose their interest and drive. Some teachers may be too easily satisfied with good work, and their low expectations may have a negative impact on the academic achievement of bright youngsters (Pirozzo, 1982). Some teachers may even be threatened by high ability students and rather than provide them with creative activities, they may continue to assign boring and repetitive work (Pirozzo, 1982). Zilli (1971) and Banks (1979) suggested the formal structure of the school may not encourage imagination or creativity, leaving bright youngsters unwilling to achieve in such an environment (Briscoe, 1977). In an educational setting where conformity is valued, the classroom standards may be designed to promote rote learning rather than critical thinking and problem solving (Wasserman, 1982), and bright students are left without challenge. Along with the rigidity of the school system, an inappropriate curriculum may also contribute to underachievement in high ability students. Average classes may be incongruous with the needs of able learners, promoting boredom with lessons designed for the all students (Banks, 1979; Cohler, 1941; Compton, 1982; Pirozzo, 1982; Ramos, 1975; Rimm, 1984; Zilli, 1971).

Rimm (1984) cautioned that underachievement may be a result of a particularly negative school year or a highly competitive environment, and therefore a situational problem. Yet once the pattern of underachievement is begun, it may continue because of reinforcement from home or school. Rimm offered a number of family scenarios which she believes reinforce underachievement. In these patterns, the youngsters model a weak or an ineffectual parent. Fine and Pitts (1980) indicated that parents and teachers may reinforce the problem by paying too much attention to the youngster's behavior. In other words, they focus on what the youngster *does not* do rather than what the youngster *does* do (Delisle, 1982). Once the school and parents have failed to stimulate bright underachievers, they

disagree with each other on the strategies to cope with the problem and whose responsibility it is to provide a solution (Fine & Pitts, 1980).

Shaw and McCuen (1960) believed that the problem is brought into the classroom and does not begin in school. Many researchers agreed that the family environment lays the foundation for bright students to underachieve. Some parents gave too little encouragement for independent behavior and not challenge the youngster, resulting in a lack of confidence about the student's own ability (Perkins, 1976). A child may have identified with a non-achieving parent (Rimm, 1984) and in some homes, a cultural and intellectual vacuum may exist (Perkins, 1976) providing the youngster with little or no inspiration to achieve.

Conflict in the home can be a contributor to underachievement. Inconsistent parenting may cause a young person to doubt his/her ability, resulting in a lack of risk-taking behavior and repression of achievement-oriented behavior (Fein, 1958). Instead, the youngster consciously decides to go along with his/her peers because going along is a safe choice. Rimm (1984) agreed that underachievement may be a form of suppressed aggression in which the youngster is in a power struggle with parents. Perkins (1976) cited inconsistent, overly strict or overly indulgent familial discipline as a contributor to underachievement. Other researchers suggested that conflicting attitudes between two parents toward the child will also lead to underachieving behaviors (Fine & Pitts, 1980; Thiel & Thiel, 1977). Often, the conflict within the family is directly related to the high ability of the child. Parents push the youngster to excel and often the future goals set by the parents do not coincide with the goals of the child. This difference in goals results in emotional conflict for the young person and contributes to underachievement (Zilli, 1971). The problem may emerge when parents insist on constant high achievement. If youngsters are constantly kept busy with achievement activities provided by parents, they may lose their sense of self, as well as any time to themselves. For them, underachievement becomes a way to escape a rigid schedule of performance and a search for self-identity (Fine, 1977).

Gender Differences

Current research and literature usually indicates that underachievement in school is more characteristic of males than females. Generally, two or three males are designated as underachievers for every female (McCall, Evahn & Kratzer, 1992). Thorndike (1963) pointed out that any average difference in academic performance between boys and girls could influence the proportion of each sex classified as underachievers. If boys generally receive poorer grades than girls and if boys and girls are combined in one sample, then more boys than girls will be identified as underachievers. Small differences between the sexes in average school performance can produce a 2:1 ratio of male to female underachievers, and the smaller the percentage of students to be designated as underachievers, the smaller the difference between the means of the sexes necessary to produce large differences in the sex ratios of underachievers (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992). However, little research has examined underachievement of students who are considered "at risk." Current research has indicated that females in particular, who may be at even higher risk than males due to pregnancy, suicide, gangs, and poverty, are failing at school and at life (Fine, 1991). In light of the current economic importance of females in the work force and society in general, it is imperative for educators to understand why some high-risk females succeed in spite of adversity and why some do not, and understand what factors contribute to that success so that an appropriate school environment can be fostered.

It would be shortsighted to conclude that the large male-to-female ratio of underachievers is nothing more than an artifact of the average difference in grades between males and females. One could define underachievers separately within sex, thereby

arbitrarily producing equal numbers of males and females. McCall, Evahn, and Kratzer (1992) point out:

> . . . grades are not given separately for males and females and no male student judges a poor report card to be "OK for a boy." Marathons may be scored separately for the sexes, but class rank is not. Even though the entire sex differential in underachievement may be associated with the sex difference in grade average, the students likely do not take that mean difference into account psychologically. And if girls generally have higher grade averages, in some sense it is reasonable that fewer girls should be underachievers. Therefore, the observation that underachievers consist of two or more males for every female is not "artifact" from a psychological perspective, but "explained" by the fact that males generally do more poorly in school. (p. 19)

In discussing gender differences in underachievement, Reis (1987) reminds us of the importance of considering reasons for these differences. Since females receive higher grades than males throughout elementary school, high school, and college (Achenbach, 1970; Coleman, 1961; Davis, 1964), Reis argues (1987) that "grades in school should not be equated with underachievement as has been suggested [in the literature]; for even though females receive higher grades throughout school, their adult professional productivity is lower" (p. 84).

Pollard (1989) conducted a study of students in middle and secondary schools in a large urban community. The purpose of her study was to identify academic success in poor, African American, and Hispanic males and females to determine which factors were associated with that success. Using Bloom's theory of alterable variables, Pollard identified alterable variables in the student, or in his or her environment, so that school performance could be enhanced. Pollard investigated achievement of minorities and accepted Ogbu's (1974) conceptual framework which suggested that the status of minority groups is related to their history and experience. In spite of their caste-like position, some children were successful in school. Pollard suggested that there are two areas which need to be investigated more fully in other enthographic studies to understand that success: those factors which are associated with academic success for these students so that the appropriate school environment can be developed; and more information on gender issues in minority groups.

Cordeiro (1991) conducted an ethnographic study of twenty successful Hispanic high school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, ten of whom were female. To be successful in school, students were aware that there needed to be a separation between home and school culture, accomplished through reinforcements from school and role models outside the family. They associated with other achieving Hispanic students and participated in magnet and honors programs. An important aspect in the conditions for success was what Cordeiro described as the "success-facilitating interpretive scheme," which was a cultural framework defining success in terms of the dominant culture and not what students believed was "typically Hispanic" (p. 289). Using this framework, the students gained the skills of time management and "playing the achievers' game," which included cheating in school (p. 289).

Behavioral Characteristics of Underachievers

A variety of personal and psychological characteristics have been attributed to underachievers and their parents, based often on clinical impressions and reports of professionals, teachers, and parents rather than on systematic, objective measurements and observations (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992). The discussion below focuses on the

following characteristics related to underachievement: self-perception, goal orientation, peer relations, authority relations, locus of control, and emotional expression.

Self-concept, or an individual's cognitive view of self, is closely tied to the more important measure of self-esteem, the feelings of worth that one's self-image produces. Most literature on self-esteem among bright underachievers is in agreement that these children perceive themselves as inadequate (Lukasic et al., 1992). Generally, underachievers are believed to have poor self-perception, low self-concept, and low self-esteem, especially with regard to their academic abilities. They are often self-critical, fear both failure and success, and are anxious or nervous, especially over their performance.

Poor self-perception is one of the most commonly cited characteristics (McCall, Evan, & Kratzer, 1992), although Davis and Connell (1985) claimed that it is not a distinguishing feature. Barrett (1957) suggested that both underachievers and achievers suffer from feelings of inadequacy, but achievers are simply motivated to prove that they are indeed adequate, while underachievers give up and withdraw from an academic situation. The withdrawal is regarded as a sign of fear of failure or success, with young people feeling they are unable to risk a performance that might end up in failure and so they do not try at all. When success does occur, underachievers may not be prepared to handle it and may refrain from telling parents for fear that parents may continue to expect such performances, which the youngsters feel uncertain of being able to repeat (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992).

Numerous researchers have discovered underachieving gifted students with overall low self-esteem (Crittenden & Fein, 1977; Saurenman & Michael, 1980; Thiel & Thiel, 1977; Whitmore, 1979, 1982; Zilli, 1971). Underachievers in Whitmore's Cupertino Program claimed that upon entering school, they began to develop feelings of low self-esteem. One fourth of the referrals to the clinic of Crittenden and colleagues were adolescent underachievers who had performed very well in elementary school. Many lacked particular advanced academic skills and had low self-concepts, as measured on the *Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale*.

Rimm (1984) cited negative comments made by underachieving youngsters about themselves as reported by parents and teachers because they were not obtaining success academically. She regarded these comments as a defense mechanism which stemmed from a low sense of self-efficacy. She concluded that youngsters would achieve if they could see a direct relationship between their efforts and positive outcomes in the classroom.

Shaw and Alves (1963) identified male eleventh and twelfth graders, who were tested on the *Bills Index of Adjustment and Values*, an instrument designed to objectively measure self-concept, self-acceptance, ideal self, and perceptions of those constructs in their peers. They found that male underachievers had significantly more negative self-concepts, were less accepting, and perceived others as less accepting than other males who were achieving. The authors concluded that males attributed lack of self-acceptance to peers.

Bachtold (1969) administered the *Children's Personality Questionnaire* to youngsters scoring in the top quartile of the *School and College Ability Tests*, and therefore differentiated as bright, and gifted underachievers. The *CPQ* is a measure of 14 personality dimensions such as confident versus insecure, and group versus self-oriented. From this instrument, the researcher found boys with poor grades had more emotional stability than boys with poor achievement test scores. High grade/low score boys were more serious about life than poor grade/poor score boys or achievers. All other boys were more sensitive as measured by the *CPQ*, than poor grade/poor score boys. The author concluded that sensitivity in young males is related to scholastic achievement.

Establishing realistic goals for high ability students is something educators and parents must consider when addressing the needs of bright underachievers. Underachievers are often said to have unrealistic goal orientations. The standards they set for themselves may be inappropriate. Gifted underachievers may be perfectionists and dissatisfied with every performance (Adderholdt-Elliott, 1989), while other underachievers have a complete lack of educational or professional aspirations. When presented with a task, they show little persistence, especially in facing a real challenge, and may react impulsively (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992).

The majority of studies report that underachievers have poor peer relationships. Typically, they lack friends and may be socially withdrawn (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1972). Fine and Pitts (1980) found that bright underachievers usually had a strong interest in something outside of school, and this interest frequently kept them isolated from their peers. Kurtz and Swenson (1951) indicated that the friends they do have often place little value on education and view school negatively. Some authors suggest that a few underachievers are highly skilled socially, greatly involved in activities, and show good leadership abilities (Kurtz & Swenson, 1951; Rimm, 1984; Taylor, 1964). Some gifted underachievers are very sensitive to interpersonal relations, and are able to discriminate details in the personalities of other young people and closely analyze social behavior (Greene, 1963; Whitmore, 1980).

Students who underachieve are often reported to have problems relating to authority figures such as their parents, teachers, and other adults. They may be overly aggressive and hostile to authority figures, exhibit discipline problems and high rates of delinquency, lack self-control, and are irresponsible and unreliable. These students may have serious problems establishing independence from their parents and may be regarded as rebellious and perceived as frequently attempting to manipulate others (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992). Some underachievers may express aggressive tendencies in a more passive manner (Roth, 1970). Bricklin and Bricklin (1967) suggested that some underachievers "hit" their parents where it hurts the most—that is, through achievement, while McIntyre (1964) perceived the dawdling, stubborn, procrastinating, and daydreaming underachiever as rebelling through inaction.

Ford (1992) examined determinants of underachievement in high ability African American students in an urban school district, and suggested that psychological factors played the greatest role in underachievement. Ford's research differed from earlier studies because it examined the perceptions of the students themselves. Ford noted that, although psychological theories offered insight to explain some of the problems that contributed to the low achievement levels of minority students, social and cultural issues must also be examined. For example, some students who underachieve may have an external locus of control, blaming other people rather than themselves for problems or failures. Other research reports underachievers as being hypercritical or negativistic toward others (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992).

Rarely are serious mental disturbances or even serious emotional problems mentioned when discussing underachievers. However, researchers discussed the apathy and flat affect of underachieving students, sometimes describing them as depressed or unhappy. A few underachievers are also said to be emotionally explosive (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992).

Parental Characteristics

The most commonly described characteristics of parents of underachievers include indifference, lack of interest, distant relationships with little affection, and neutral to negative attitudes toward education (Barrett, 1957; Drews & Teahan, 1957; Fliegler, 1957; Gowan,

1957; Gurman, 1970; Khatena, 1982; Kurtz & Swenson, 1951; Miller, 1961; Pirozzo, 1982; Rocks et al., 1985; Westman & Bennett, 1985; Zilli, 1971). These characteristics may occur singly or in combination with two other themes. One is an authoritarian, restrictive, and rejecting parental style (Fliegler, 1957; Khatena, 1982; McIntyre, 1964; Pirozzo, 1982; Roth, 1970; Westman & Bennett, 1985; Zilli, 1971), especially by the father. The second theme involves permissiveness and freedom, bordering on parental neglect. With a gifted underachiever, it may often be a case of the youngster leading the parent, who treats the child as an independent, miniature adult (Gurman, 1970; Lowenstein, 1982; McIntyre, 1964; Rimm, 1984; Zilli, 1971).

Gowan (1955), Shaw and Dutton (1962), and Karnes et al. (1961) indicated that parents of high ability underachievers are often more negative toward their children than parents of high ability achievers. Gowan (1955) suggested that they are not only rejecting, they are indifferent toward their children. As a result, underachievers tend to become self-sufficient. Since their parents are not supportive, they fail to identify with their parents.

Other researchers cited an overemphasis on achievement as a parental characteristic. Extensive parental pressure and preoccupation with achievement to the exclusion of all other characteristics of the youngster can lead to underachievement. Professionals have claimed that the overindulgent, overprotective parent who is simply too helpful can also be problematic. The parent who reminds, teaches, and helps the youngster accomplish every task may actually do more damage than good. Youngsters come to believe that they cannot do anything independently and fail to develop any sense of self-sufficiency, responsibility, or feelings of self-fulfillment (Bricklin & Bricklin, 1967; Gurman, 1970; Lowenstein, 1982; McIntyre, 1964; Miller, 1961; Roth, 1970; Zilli, 1971).

Parental inconsistency is a problem which may worsen a situation for underachievers. If two parents represent different parenting styles, the youngster may face greater trouble. Rimm (1984) and McIntyre (1964) described types of families where inconsistency occurs. In one type, father restricts and controls the child in an authoritarian fashion, and mother capitulates to the youngster, trying to compensate. The opposite situation occurs when mother is an ogre. The third type of inconsistency occurs when father is uneducated or simply withdraws from child rearing in the face of mother's dominance. In each case, there is a strong and a weak parent, neither of which helps to promote achievement; and the unhealthy combination enables the youngster to play one parent against the other.

School Environment and Underachievement

Few scholars argue directly that underachievers are poorly served by the schools. When this assertion is made, it usually refers to gifted underachievers, who are thought to be bored or not stimulated in school (Mallis, 1983; Pirozzo, 1982; Sahler, 1983). Torrance (1962) and Whitmore (1980) referred specifically the creativity of gifted students, which may not fit the typical classroom situation which focuses on achieving the "one right answer." Whitmore (1980) and Myers (1980) argued that the instructional strategies of classroom teachers, curricula, and the typical classroom climate are unsuitable for high ability students. Teachers may judge students only on the basis of their performance (Stern, 1963); apply unreasonable pressure for achievement (Lowenstein, 1982); and conduct strict, autocratic classes emphasizing rote, repetitive learning (Pirozzo, 1982), which is inappropriate for able learners.

In summary, most researchers concluded that more general agreement is needed in defining exactly what is gifted or high ability underachievement. Most agreed that the earlier underachievers are identified, the better the opportunity of concerned adults to reverse

the patterns of underachievement. Though several researchers offered a combination of determinants as contributing to underachievement, most authors advanced a single factor in attributing cause to academic underachievement. Predominantly examined in the research were familial factors and school environment. Biological, personal, and peer influences were also suggested as possible contributors. Although the data were not uniform or complete, underachievers were disproportionately male and from lower socioeconomic and larger families. These last two variables were correlated, and it may not be surprising to find underachievers to be later-born children from larger families. Divorce was commonly reported to be more frequent in families of underachievers, and this factor, also, may have been associated with socioeconomic status. Overall, the majority of authors agreed that low self-esteem was a predominant characteristic among this population. The reasons for the low self-esteem in students who underachieve vary. Some concluded that low self-concept comes from inability to achieve in school while others saw negative self-image as a root to underachievement.

Summary

This chapter included a discussion of some of the issues related to achievement and underachievement in an urban area. Definitions of underachievement were discussed as were specific reasons suggested by the research that some children achieve or underachieve in school. Research specific to the underachievement of various populations investigated in this study, including Hispanic and African American students, were discussed as was newer research related to reasons that some urban students were able to achieve in school.

CHAPTER 3: Research Methodology

This study employed multiple methodologies. Ethnographic research methodology, comparative case study, and the use of grounded theory analysis were all employed in this study to examine the high school experiences of culturally diverse high ability students who achieve or underachieve in an inner-city context. In this chapter, details regarding the ethnographic process; sampling procedures; data collection, coding and analysis; and other procedures are described.

Ethnography

The methodology of ethnography has been developed and utilized within the discipline of anthropology. Ethnography has been defined by many anthropologists over time and a number have attempted to outline and define characteristics of an ethnographic approach to studying education (Erickson, 1973, 1977; Ogbu, 1981; Rist, 1975; Wolcott, 1975). Wolcott's (1975) definition of ethnography as the science of cultural description conveys an understanding which is basic to all definitions. Spradley (1979) has defined ethnography as "the work of describing a culture" (p. 3). Pelto (1982) defines ethnography as "the description of social behavior among any group of people among whom social relations are regulated by shared cultural patterns" (p. 458). Fetterman (1989) has interpreted ethnography as "the art and science of describing a group or culture" (p. 11) and Borg and Gall (1989) have defined this methodology as "an in-depth analytical description of an intact cultural scene" (p. 387).

In each of the above definitions, the term "culture" is consistently used. Spradley (1979) defined culture as the "acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior" (p. 5). The term "culture" is an important organizing concept in ethnographic research as it provides an abstraction which helps the researcher formulate observations and perceptions, thus providing a framework for understanding the rules operating in a given setting (Amand, 1984). In this study, the culture under investigation involves the experiences students have in their school and within their families, and how these experiences influence their behaviors.

Fetterman (1989) explained ethnography in describing a culture by comparing it to the work of an investigative reporter. He said:

> The description may be of a small tribal group in some exotic land or a classroom in middle-class suburbia. The task is much like the one taken on by an investigative reporter, who interviews relevant people, reviews records, weighs the credibility of one person's opinions against another's, looks for ties to special interests and organizations, and writes the story for a concerned public as well as professional colleagues. A key difference between the investigative reporter and the ethnographer, however, is that where the journalist seeks out the unusual—the murder, the plane crash, the bank robbery—the ethnographer writes about the routine, daily lives of people. The more predictable patterns of human thought and behavior are the focus of inquiry. (p. 11)

The goal of an ethnographer is to focus on a setting and to "discover what is going on there" (Wolcott, 1975). An ethnographer is engaged in an ongoing process of inquiry, guided by several anthropological principles. First, an ethnographer attempts to set aside personal preconceptions or stereotypes about what is being observed and investigates the

setting as it is viewed by the participants in an exploratory and open-ended approach. Second, the ethnographer attempts to understand events in terms of meanings held by those in the setting. Third, the ethnographer must look at the relationship between the setting and its context to obtain an understanding of why things take place as they do. Such a relationship may be examined between a group of students and the school as a whole. Fourth, the ethnographer uses a personal knowledge of existing social theory to guide observations (Wilcox, 1982).

One begins ethnographic fieldwork "not with a tabula rasa but with a foreshadowed problem in mind" (Wilcox, 1982, p. 459). The problem is usually general in scope such as the issues of achievement and underachievement examined in this ethnography. Since the researcher is attempting to understand a culture in its own terms, the researcher cannot predict in advance which aspects of the culture will have significance. As an ethnographer, one assumes that particular aspects of a culture can be understood only in the context of the whole; therefore, one cannot predict in advance precisely where one should focus. It is crucial to begin the research without predetermined categories of observation or precise hypotheses. An important part of the research process is discovering what makes sense to consider and what is significant, therefore, an ethnographer is continuously involved in a process of inquiry (Erickson, 1977; Wilcox, 1982.).

Case Study Research

Yin (1984, 1994), in his most recent explanations of the case study method in social science research, indicates the complexity of this type of design and suggests five components of case study research design are important: a study's questions, its propositions, if any; its units of analysis, the logic linking the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings. The role of theory development, prior to data collection, is a difference between the use of case study research and ethnography.

In this study, multiple case studies were used to examine the questions related to the phenomenon of achievement in an urban high school. Comparisons were made between students who achieved and underachieved to investigate why students from similar backgrounds achieved and underachieved in high school. As suggested by Yin (1984), six sources of evidence were used in this study: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts. These were used in combination with the ethnographic methods discussed above which provided the researchers with an in-depth understanding of the high school in which the study was conducted.

A case study database was created and a chain of evidence was maintained throughout the entire data gathering and coding period. The database was organized by each participant case, and included observations, copies of documents, archival records, protocol responses, and transcripts of open-ended interviews and structured interviews.

In the next phase, analytical strategies for data analysis were selected. In this study, the major areas were coded numerically, and the frequency of different events was tabulated. In addition, explanation building was also employed (Yin, 1994). Explanation building is the attempt to explain a phenomenon by stipulating a set of causal links about it. These causal links are similar to independent variables and may be complex and difficult to measure. The explanations occur in narrative form, and causal links reflect critical insights into social science theory. Final explanations are usually the result of a series of iterations including: making an initial theoretical statement or an initial proposition about policy or social behavior, comparing the findings of an initial case against the proposition, revising the

proposition, comparing other details of the case against the revision, revising the proposition, comparing the revision to the facts of additional cases, and repeating the process as many times as needed.

The Beginning of the Study

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) requested permission of an urban public school system to conduct the study at a large high school, called by the pseudonym of South Central High School. This school served a student population of 1,656, primarily Hispanic and African American youth, in grades 9-12, and was located in an urban area in the northeastern part of the United States. South Central High School was one of three high schools in the city, and its population was the most culturally diverse. Approval for the study was granted by appropriate school personnel including the Assistant Superintendents for School Sites and for Support Programs and Services.

Selection of Participants

Sampling Procedure

As a part of this ethnography, 35 young men and women were interviewed intensively to investigate their perceptions about their achievement or underachievement in high school. Due to the nature of the study, purposeful sampling was used. In this procedure, participants are selected based on their ability to aid in the generation of theory and the data in which theory is grounded. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that purposeful sampling enables researchers to closely examine cases which deviate from the norm to "obtain information about unusual cases that may be particularly troublesome or enlightening" (p. 102). Purposeful sampling increases the scope or range of the data collected.

Participants

The case study participants were 35 high ability high school males and females in grades 9-12. The rationale for the selectivity of the sample is stated in Lincoln and Guba (1985):

> It is likely that, in sharp contrast to the usual situation in conventional inquiry, sampling can be terminated after a rather small number of elements has been included; for example, interviewing members of some particular group, it is usual to find that a dozen or so interviews, if properly selected, will exhaust most available information; to include as many as twenty will surely reach well beyond the point of redundancy. (pp. 234-235)

Of the 35 high ability participants, 18 were demonstrating above average performance in academic subjects and were identified as achievers. Seventeen of the participants were performing below average academically and were identified as underachievers. The majority of these participants were from families of low socio-economic status. Demographic data about the participants in this study are included in Table 1.

Table 1

Student Demographics for Grade Level, Race/Ethnicity, Test Information, QPA Average and Class Track

Student	Grade	Race/Ethnicity	Subject	Test Percentiles	Average QPA Class Track
Male Achievers					
Vaughn	12	White	Math	96	8.8/B
			Reading	96	H
Rafael	12	Hispanic	Math	88	8.9/B
			Reading	90	H
Lucio	11	Hispanic	Math	99	8.7/B
			Reading	99	H
Orlando	11	Hispanic	Math	94	11.4/A+
			Reading	85	H
Matteo	11	White	Math	97	8.8/B
			Reading	98	H
Wallace	11	African American	Math	88	6.3/C+
			Reading	88	H/A
Rob	11	White	Math	96	10.9/A+
			Reading	92	H/A
Alfred	9	African American	Math	99	10.2/A
			Reading	98	A
Jesse	9	African American	Math	92	9.7/A-
			Reading	96	H

Note. National achievement scores on either the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) or Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) taken in high school.
G = General, A = Academic, and H = Honors

(table continues)

Table 1 *(continued)*

Student Demographics for Grade Level, Race/Ethnicity, Test Information, QPA Average and Class Track

Student	Grade	Race/Ethnicity	Subject	Test Percentiles	Average QPA Class Track
Male Underachievers					
John	12	African American	Math Reading	86 99	4.4/D+ A/G
Benton	11	African American	Math Reading	90 96	4.0/D A/G
Mitch	11	White	Math Reading	99 96	4.9/C- H/A
Chico	10	Hispanic	Math Reading	99 93	1.8/D- A
Morgan	10	White	Math Reading	99 97	8.7/B- H
Skip	10	White	Math Reading	94 82	1.7/D- A
Martin	10	African American	Math Reading	90 80	6.3/B- H/A
Greg	9	African American	Math Reading	91 48	2.5/D A/G
Kevin	9	African American	Math Reading	91 77	3.5/D H/A
Leo	9	African American	Math Reading	84 82	5.5/C H/A
Marwin	9	Hispanic	Math Reading	93 90	0.0/F H/A/G
Milton	9	Hispanic	Math Reading	97 99	1.82/D H/A

Note. National achievement scores on either the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) or Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) taken in high school.
G = General, A = Academic, and H = Honors

(table continues)

Table 1 *(continued)*

Student Demographics for Grade Level, Race/Ethnicity, Test Information, QPA Average and Class Track

Student	Grade	Race/Ethnicity	Subject	Test Percentiles	Average QPA Class Track
Female Achievers					
Alexa	12	Hispanic	Math Reading	94 98	11.46/A+ H
Nicki	12	White	Math Reading	91 95	11.02/A+ H
Mary	12	White	Math Reading	96 94	11.03/A+ H
Marisa	12	White	Math Reading	99 98	97.16 H
Jana	12	Hispanic	Math Reading	95 97	99.16 H
Rosa	12	Hispanic	Math Reading	90 98	11.10/A+ H
Toni	12	African American	Math Reading	78 90	10.6/A H
Tania	10	African American	Math Reading	93 91	10.6/A H
Claire	10	African American	Math Reading	92 90	9.3/B+ H

Note. National achievement scores on either the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) or Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) taken in high school.
G = General, A = Academic, and H = Honors

(table continues)

Table 1 *(continued)*

Student Demographics for Grade Level, Race/Ethnicity, Test Information, QPA Average and Class Track

Student	Grade	Race/Ethnicity	Subject	Test Percentiles	Average QPA Class Track
Female Underachievers					
Mandy	12	African American	Math Reading	92 86	7.3/B H/A
Sandra	12	Hispanic	Math Reading	98 98	8.64/B H
Rose Marie	10	Hispanic	Math Reading	98 82	6.7/B- A
Yvellise	9	Hispanic	Math Reading	93 90	6.89/B- A/G
Ivy	9	Hispanic	Math Reading	92 91	5.0/C- H/A

Note. National achievement scores on either the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) or Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) taken in high school.
G = General, A = Academic, and H = Honors

For the purpose of this study, a high ability student was defined as one who had shown above average potential as measured by a standardized intelligence or an achievement test above the 85th percentile using local norms during his school career, or who had demonstrated superior performance in one or more academic areas. The participants were recommended by the high school's guidance counselors and administrators. Those students identified for the study as achievers met three of the following four criteria:

1. The student had been enrolled in an academically gifted program or,
2. was achieving at a superior level academically as evidenced by high grades,
3. had received a teacher/counselor nomination, or
4. academic awards and honors.

Information such as school records, test information, outstanding performance in one or more academic areas, awards and honors, product information, and teachers' anecdotal records from an academic portfolio were used to document the level of high ability.

For the purpose of this study, underachieving students were defined as students with high potential as evidenced by academic achievement or intelligence tests results of above the 85th percentile using local norms, who were not achieving at a level that is expected,

based on this potential. These students, for example, may not have been enrolled in any advanced level or honors courses. They may have been receiving lower grades than those who would be expected given their potential. High ability students identified for the study as underachieving had to meet the criteria specified above (85th percentile on an IQ or achievement test and sustained performance).

Additionally, the following criteria were examined to select underachieving students for this study:

1. The student was enrolled in a gifted program and was previously achieving at a superior level academically as evidenced by grades, teacher observation, awards or honors, or
2. the student had previously displayed consistent strong academic performance with grades of B or better in elementary and junior high school,
3. the student was presently maintaining a grade point average of 2.0 or lower, or
4. the student was consistently enrolled in non-college bound or general classes, or
5. the student was no longer in school, having dropped out or become truant.

Data Collection

Data collection in this study consisted of participant observation, interviewing, field notes, document review, projective techniques, the analysis of outcroppings, proxemics, and kinesics. Data were collected over a period of two and a half years. Four researchers were involved in data collection. One team of researchers, a White male and a White female, began the data collection by becoming involved in the high school through participant observation techniques explained below. At the conclusion of one semester of data gathering, a third researcher, a Puerto Rican female joined the research team and data collection continued. A fourth researcher, an African American male, joined the research team during the second year of data gathering.

Participant observation characterizes most ethnographic research and involves immersion in a culture. This approach combines participation in the lives of the people under study with maintenance of a professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data. Participant observation requires long-term contact with the people under study. Long term residence helps the researcher internalize the basic belief system of the culture being studied (Fetterman, 1989).

The participant observer, by being actively involved in the situation being observed, gains insights and develops interpersonal relationships that are impossible to achieve through any other method. In explaining participant observation, Borg and Gall (1989) described three levels of participation. At the first level, *complete participation*, the individual becomes a full member of the culture and the role of observer is concealed. At the second level, the researcher functions *primarily as a participant*, keeping observational activities as unobtrusive as possible. At the third level, the individual functions *primarily as an observer*, but participates enough to gain rapport with the culture and develop a better understanding of the culture's functions and relationships.

In this study, the first two researchers spent 187 days of an academic year primarily as observers, conducting observations at school, at home, and in the community. Case study data were collected from social, athletic, and academic settings. During school visits, the

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researchers collected observational data from the following sites: the students' academic classes, physical education classes in the gymnasium, swimming classes, the cafeteria, science labs, the school library, the art room, the automobile technology center, the school corridors while students passed between classes, the in-house detention center, and study halls. The researchers also attended after-school club meetings and activities, a morning Bible study prayer group, a pep rally, a musical concert, cultural assemblies, an academic awards assembly, field trips to college campuses, student meetings with college recruiters, football, basketball, and hockey games, as well as several swim meets.

The two White researchers interviewed students and constructed case studies from all cultural groups, focusing their interviews on specific gender groups. That is, the female researcher interviewed female students and the male researcher interviewed male students. The Hispanic researcher interviewed students from all cultural groups initially, but concentrated on interviews with Hispanic students and home site visits. The African American researcher interviewed all African American males and some females.

In the case of several students involved in the study, researchers provided participants with individual field trips in order to observe the students' behaviors in a setting unlike the high school environment. For example, one researcher provided one young man with a downtown visit to a U.S. Marine recruiter's office while other participants toured a university campus with the researchers. With approximately 40% of students, the researchers observed the students at home with parents, siblings, and relatives. While the academic setting remained the major focus of observation, information gained in school and through interviews led the research team to other observations and interviews in the community.

Interviewing

Interviews "explain and put into a larger context what the researcher sees and experiences" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 47). In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted in constructing case studies. An interview protocol developed by the researchers guided the interviews. Semi-structured interviews are "verbal approximations of a questionnaire with explicit research goals" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 48). They consist of open-ended questions designed to explore general topics. The goal of a semi-structured interview is to not only gain information in the participants' own words but to develop insight about how the participants interpret their world.

In this study, the interviews were conducted to obtain a more complete understanding of the views of the participants themselves, providing a clear understanding of the experiences of high ability students in an urban high school. Interviewing was conducted with the identified students, current teachers, former teachers, administrators, school guidance counselors, parents, siblings, other relatives, community members, friends, and other parties as they emerged through related data gathering techniques.

Grand Tour Questions and Specific Questions

A "grand tour question" (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972) is designed to elicit a broad picture of the participant's world. Such questions help define the boundaries of a study and help to focus and direct the investigation (Fetterman, 1989). In a study about the experiences of high ability students in an urban high school, a grand tour question is: "Tell me what it's like to attend this high school." Grand tour questions lead to information that allow the researcher to construct a basic map of the culture and isolate preliminary topics. Such information stimulates a flow of specific, detailed questions, followed by more grand

tour questions, which again lead to more detailed questions until the researcher has constructed a well designed conceptual framework (Fetterman, 1989).

Once the researcher reveals a significant category through grand tour questions, then specific questions about the category become useful. Where grand tour questions shape and inform the researcher with a general understanding, specific questions probe further into an established category and refine and expand that understanding (Fetterman, 1989). For example, in this study the researchers posed the grand tour question about what it was like to attend the urban high school. The participants' responses to the question provided an insider's perspective on the high school's cultural diversity. Probing further, the researchers elicited a detailed description of the students' belief in the importance of cultural diversity as part of their educational experience.

Key Actor or Informant Interviewing

Some people are more articulate and culturally sensitive than others and constitute what Fetterman (1989) calls excellent "key actors" (p. 58) or informants. In the cultural group under study, this individual is one of the many actors, and may not be a central figure in the community. Yet this person "becomes a key actor in the theater of ethnographic research and plays a pivotal role" (p. 58) linking the researcher to the community. Key actors can provide the researcher with historical data, knowledge about interpersonal relationships and a wealth of information about the subtle nuances of everyday life within the culture being studied. Though the ethnographer attempts to speak with as many people as possible, time is always a factor and therefore, he/she must often rely heavily on several key individuals in a group (Fetterman, 1989).

Key actors require careful selection for they are rarely perfect representatives of a group. They are usually members of the mainstream and have access to the up-to-date cultural information. Key actors may be what Fetterman (1989) calls "cultural brokers" (p. 59), straddling two cultures. Their position in two cultures may give them a special vantage point and objectivity about their culture.

In this study, key actors came from a variety of groups, for example a vivacious, vocal, and experienced faculty member in the urban high school was also a mother of one young man involved in this study. This woman was also a strong supporter of the school's swim team since her son was involved in the sport and she provided rides home from school in her van to a number of the young men included in this study. This key informant was able to provide one researcher with insights into the culture of the swim team at the high school, student perceptions about the daily experiences of the high ability students in classes, which she often overheard in her van, and her perceptions as a faculty member of the high school.

Field Notes

Fetterman (1989) emphasizes the importance of field notes by describing them as "the brick and mortar of an ethnographic structure" (p. 107). Field notes consist primarily of data collected from interviews and daily observations. They form an early stage of analysis during data collection and contain raw data necessary for more elaborate analyses later in the study.

During this investigation, both field observations and interviews with students in this study were recorded using handwritten notes in hard covered notebooks. These field notes included the following:

(a) direct field observations, scratch notes, field jottings or notes taken while observing or talking with informants,
(b) expanded field notes, notes made mentally or notes made after the actual observation or interview. These were notes on the memories of past field research experiences that were not possible to record at the moment (Ottenberg, 1990); and
(c) researcher's personal notes on a variety of ideas, insights, events, and people.

After each day of observation, field notes were used as rough drafts and/or outlines of the interviews themselves with the purpose of shaping subsequent interviews. In this investigation, tape recording did not substitute, direct field notes. Transcription of interviews was expected to be a time consuming task. Actually, up to six interviews forty-five minutes long were sometimes made in one single day. One single forty-five minute interview required six to eight hours of transcription. For this reason, it was impossible to transcribe all the interviews conducted on the same day. In addition, it was sometimes impossible to carry the researchers' notebooks. For this reason, a pocket notebook was used to make quick notes regarding important things that the researcher wanted to write about later. Duplicates of the field notes were also obtained to prevent the loss of notes and further complications.

Tape Recording

Half of the interviews were transcribed by the researchers, while the others were transcribed by assistant personnel at the Life History Center at The University of Connecticut. Most transcriptions were reviewed and corrected by the informants. In some cases, informants took the transcriptions of their interviews to be reviewed at home and discussed later with the researcher. In other occasions, transcriptions of the interviews were reviewed by the informants at school and a discussion with the researcher followed.

Non-Verbal Cues

While observing and interviewing, attention was given to non-verbal behaviors. Non-verbal behaviors played a role in this investigation for instances of non-verbal communications were recorded and analyzed under the assumption that these behaviors were important for a better understanding of actual situations. For instance, during one interview with a key informant, one researcher noticed that the facial expressions and the tone of the voice of the key informant did not match the actual words and/or story of the informant. As a result, further questioning occurred; and a clearer picture of the topic was obtained. This is an example of using paralinguistic cues. Paralinguistic cues include non-verbal communication related to the volume, voice quality, accent, and inflectional patterns among others. Other types of non-verbal communication observed during this investigation were kinetics or body movements, proxemics or spatial relationships, and parachronemics or the use of time as in pacing, probing, and pausing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Photography

Photography has been a technique widely used by cultural anthropologists. Pictures help to document the scene under which an investigation was taking place. During this investigation, pictures were taken relating to the school physical environment, the school students' population, teachers, staff, administrators, special school events, unexpected events out of the school, and the immediate community among others. For instance, one researcher had the opportunity to take pictures of an incident in which several gang members were arrested by the police in front of the school while waiting for two student members of an opposite gang.

Document Review

Public as well as personal documents are commonly used in case studies. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), documents are usually rich, stable, and sometimes freely available sources of information. Examination of this type of material was aimed to assist in developing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

During this study, each researcher examined personal documents such as: (a) key informants' cumulative records including students' grade reports, test results, teachers' observations, disciplinary actions, academic awards, etc.; (b) informants' written work such as poems and notes on specific topics related to this investigation. In addition, public documents such as newspapers, magazines, flyers, and memoranda were reviewed. The documents collected during this investigation were either photocopied, bought, or borrowed for further revision. For instance, key informants' cumulative records were photocopied in total to avoid omitting important details or losing the context of the material (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983).

Projective Techniques

Projective techniques are also useful in ethnographic research for they supplement and enhance the work of an ethnographer. These techniques elicit cultural and often psychological information from group members. Typically, the ethnographer presents an item to the participant and asks the participant to respond. The participant's perception provides the researcher with additional insights. The participant's responses usually reveal individual needs, fears, and a general view of the world (Fetterman, 1989). However revealing, projective techniques never stand alone for the researcher uses these techniques in a larger research context to better understand elicited responses.

In this study, researchers sometimes used an editorial written by a student attending the high school. Inspired by a controversial court case involving the disparity between state funds allocated to suburban schools versus urban schools, the editorial was published in the *Centerfield Gazette*. The student had attended school in both the suburbs and the inner city school and was comparing his experiences in the editorial. This well written piece became an effective tool in getting some of the young people involved in the study to respond to how they felt about their environment and provided the researcher with additional new insights.

Outcroppings

Fetterman (1989) defines outcroppings as "a portion of the bedrock that is visible on the surface, in other words, something that sticks out" (p. 68). For example, outcroppings in ethnographic research in an inner-city high school might include yards littered with trash, the chain link fence surrounding the school yard, athletic and academic trophies prominently displayed or the smell of marijuana coming from a student lavatory. The absence of graffiti in the building might be as important as its presence. The researcher must place these visible cues in a larger context, assess this information carefully, and not ignore it or take it for granted.

In this study, one example of an outcropping that became significant was an electronic device known as a "beeper" worn by students at the waist. According to students, the beeper was a method for keeping in touch with drug pushers. The question was whether the students were actually involved in drug running for a pusher or whether the beepers were simply a status symbol for the young men. These beepers had been outlawed by the

administration and were a source of conflict between students and teachers throughout the building.

Proxemics and Kinesics

Proxemics is the "analysis of socially defined distance between people" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 69). Students who remain physically distant from their teachers may feel a tenuous relationship with them. Seating arrangements in a classroom may have social meaning. The seating arrangement during an interview may indicate the level of comfort between the interviewer and respondent. In this study, proxemics were noted throughout the researchers' field notes. These observations helped with interpretation and cross-checking the findings with other data.

Kinesics focuses on body language (Fetterman, 1989). Sensitivity to body language can also be instrumental in ethnographic research. A clenched fist, a condescending teacher's facial expression, a student slouched in his/her chair during an interview and many other physical statements provide useful information to an observant ethnographer. In context, this information may partially confirm suspicions, generate hypotheses, and provide additional understanding. In this study, kinesics were also noted throughout the researchers' field notes and used in interpreting the data.

Data

Data Storing

Initially, recorded data were organized chronologically for each case study, however, after a month of fieldwork, the data were organized using indexes. Indexes were developed for interviews and field notes. For example, key words or relevant phrases embedded in all recorded data (concordances) were underlined. In cases where no embedded cues were readily available in the data then the researchers inserted words to identify the segments in need of a label. For each field-note journal, an index was created at the end. Indexes were also prepared for the transcribed interviews and the collected documents. Finally, these indexes were merged in a master index based on each case study.

In addition, a tape index and a photographic record were developed. The tape index included information such as the informant's name, number of interviews, date of the interview, date of transcription, descriptors, and a tape identification number. The record of pictures followed a chronological format. Transcriptions, field notes, students' records, tapes, photos, and other documents were organized by case study and stored in a file cabinet in the researchers' office in The University of Connecticut. The NRC/GT will keep the data collected during this investigation for a period of seven years.

Data Coding and Data Analyses

The coding paradigm suggested by Strauss (1987) was used in this study. Data were coded for relevance to specific phenomena within a given category for: "conditions, interaction among the actors, strategies and tactics, and consequences" (pp. 27-28). Three types of coding described by Strauss (1987) and explained below were used in this study.

Open Coding

The initial type of coding, known as open coding, involves unrestricted coding of all data involved by the careful scrutiny of field notes, interviews, cultural artifacts or any other pertinent documents. In open coding the researcher tries to identify concepts that seem to fit the data and "open up" the inquiry (Strauss, 1987, p. 29). At this point, the researcher attempts to remain open and code by the data as well as the experiential background the researcher may have and the body of literature which has been reviewed.

While involved in open coding, the researcher consistently analyzes whether the data are pertinent, and what category various incidents indicate. In open coding, data are analyzed minutely and coded in order to verify and qualify the theory that is emerging. During open coding, the researcher often interrupts the coding to write theoretical memos. Strauss (1987) defines these theoretical memos as "writing in which the researcher puts down the theoretical questions, hypotheses and summary of codes" (p. 22). Memo writing is a system of keeping track of coding results and stimulating further coding. This technique also serves as a means for integrating the theory. In open coding, individual codes emerge and initially may be plentiful. As the researcher attempts to verify codes and determine relationships among and between codes, a determination is made about the relationship of a code to a category.

Axial Coding

After initial categories are determined, axial coding enables the researcher to intensely analyze one category at a time in terms of the coding paradigm discussed earlier. This enables cumulative knowledge to emerge about relationships between that category and other categories. Axial coding rarely occurs during the early stages of open coding but becomes more paramount after initial data are collected and analyzed. Axial coding can occur during the latter stages of open coding, often being done alternately while open coding continues. In this study, for example, the following areas were originally coded as separate categories: teachers who cared, helpful coaches, and counselors who provided guidance. In the axial coding stage, it became apparent that relationships existed between and among these concepts, and they were eventually merged into a category labeled supportive adults. Axial coding enables the researcher to specify relationships among the many categories that emerge in open coding and ultimately resulting in the conceptualization of one or more categories selected as the "core."

Selective Coding

A core category is defined as one "that is central to the integration of the theory" (Strauss, 1987, p. 21). When a researcher codes systematically and purposefully for the core category, selective coding occurs. In this stage, a core category is selected and coding is conducted to limit coding only to those areas which relate to the core category. The core category "becomes a guide to further sampling and data collection" (Strauss, 1987, p. 33). For example, in this study, aspirations, inner will, and multi-cultural appreciation were identified as categories as a result of the first few interviews in the earliest stages of open coding. They were grouped as one category in axial coding and later became the core category labeled belief in self in this stage of selective coding. For example, asking about what motivated the student was not planned in the initial interview protocol. However, after two or three participants indicated having an internal fortitude that drove them, questions about this inner will were asked and the ingredients of this inner will were sought and discussed with all subsequent participants. During selective coding, the "conditions, interaction among the actors, strategies and tactics, and the consequences" (Strauss, 1987, pp. 27-28) are sought and coded.

Strauss (1987) describes the emerging categories as two types: sociological constructs and in vivo codes, which are described as taken or derived from the language used by the participants involved in the study. The participants use certain terms to describe their situation and how to deal with their culture appropriately. In vivo codes are used both analytically and for imagery. In this study, in vivo coding was extremely useful in creating images of the positive relationships among members of the high school men's swim team and their coach. An image of a family-like environment by the high school swimming pool often appeared through in vivo coding. Sociological codes are formulated by the researcher's scholarly knowledge and the knowledge of the field under study. Sociological constructions are broader, and are usually based on social science concerns.

Core Categories

In the development of grounded theory, a goal is the generation of theory that accounts for behaviors. A core category accounts for most of the variation in a pattern of behavior. "The generation of theory occurs around a core category" (Strauss, 1987, p. 34). Researchers using the methods of data analysis discussed by Strauss (1987) consciously attempt to identify a core category while coding data. Various core categories should be labeled provisionally, and then an attempt should be made to theoretically saturate those categories which may explain the problems or research questions being addressed. At this point, the relationships among categories are examined to determine the saturation of categories in the identification of the core category. Strauss (1987) suggested the use of memos to identify the core category by its relationship to other categories. The following criteria, suggested by Strauss (1987), were used in this study to verify the core categories:

1. It was a central core related to most other categories more than any other category.
2. It appeared frequently in the data.
3. It related easily to other categories.
4. It has clear implications for a more general theory.
5. As the details of the core category emerge through analysis, the theory advances.
6. The core category enables the researcher to build maximum variation to the analysis as the researcher uses the coding paradigm discussed earlier.

Coders and Core Categories

In this study, four researchers coded all of the data, including all interviews and the variety of documents described earlier. Additionally, three other researchers from the staff of The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) coded interviews to verify codes. This team of culturally diverse research assistants from NRC/GT spent several days examining the selective coding completed once the core categories were determined. These guidelines parallel those suggested by Strauss (1987).

Integrative Diagrams

The coding and memo writing described by Strauss (1987) were used in this study and resulted ultimately in the categories being kept in analytical focus throughout the data collection and coding process, and the subsequent creation of successive operational integrative diagrams (Strauss, 1987, p. 70). An integrative diagram is a schematic which helps to explain how a theory is organized or "integrated." According to Strauss, integrative diagrams serve several functions including the integration of what is known, contributing to

analytic security, stimulating the researcher to follow through on the implications of the diagram, clarifying what is not known and finally, acting as a touchstone allowing the researcher to relate new advances to previous analysis. The integrative diagrams depicted in Figures 1 and 2 (see Chapter 7) emerged after several drafts and throughout various phases of the study. The integrative diagram is based upon the coding paradigm discussed earlier, the core categories and the associated memos written during coding. The following is a general outline of the process involved in developing the integrative diagrams presented in Figures 1 and 2.

A. Open Coding
    1. Labeling of all the data
        a. Guideline: What does this event or idea represent?
    2. Sorting and grouping of similar incidents, events or ideas
        a. Guideline: To what class of factors does it seem to pertain?

B. Axial Coding
    1. Identifying subcategories (causal conditions/reasons for the occurrence of underachievement) within the pre-established categories for this investigation
        a. Guidelines: What are the characteristics, attributes, properties of this incident(s) or idea(s)? How this incident or idea is similar or different from the other ones? Why? To what class of phenomenon do these ideas or incidents seem to pertain? How do these ideas or incidents relate to each other? What name can I use to represent this particular causal or antecedent condition for the underachievement of these students?

C. Selective Coding
    1. Integrating data to form a grounded theory
        a. Guidelines: How do these categories and subcategories interact with each other? What is the main problem? What is the core phenomenon (category) embedded in these data? What the subsidiary categories? How can I develop a comprehensive picture of these findings? How can I lay out the theory grounded in these data?

The Development of Grounded Theory

Strauss (1987) and Glaser (1978) explain that the term grounded theory arrives from an emphasis on the generation of theory and the data in which theory is grounded. Strauss (1987) explains:

> Grounded theory is a detailed grounding by systematically and intensively analyzing data, often sentence by sentence, or phrase by phrase of the field notes, interview, or other document; by constant comparison, data are extensively collected and coded . . . thus producing a well-constructed theory. (p. 22)

Accordingly, all of the steps in the collection, coding and analysis described in this chapter were involved in the organization of the ideas emerging from data analysis into a conceptually woven, integrated theory. According to Strauss and Glaser, this theory is discovered and formulated in developmental stages in conjunction with the intensive analysis of data. The grounded theory that evolved from this study is presented in Chapter 7.

Establishing the Soundness of the Study

All research must be evaluated for trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have posed a series of questions that are helpful in determining the worth of a study. They ask:

1. How truthful are the particular findings of the study? By what criteria can we judge them?
2. How applicable are these findings to another setting or group of people?
3. How can we be reasonably sure that the findings would be replicated if the study were conducted with the same participants in the same context?
4. How can we be sure that the findings are reflective of the subjects and the inquiry itself rather than the product of the researcher's biases or prejudices?

To respond to these questions, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four constructs that accurately reflect the assumptions of the qualitative paradigm. They are: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

In establishing credibility, the goal of the researcher is to demonstrate the study was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately described. The strength of a study that attempts to explore a problem or describe a social group and its interaction will be its validity (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Within the parameters of the setting and the population under investigation, the research will be valid and therefore, a researcher must adequately state those parameters.

The second construct referred to as transferability can be explained as "demonstrating the applicability of one set of findings to another context" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 144). To enhance the transferability, the researcher must state the theoretical framework or the parameters of the research so that policy makers or those who design research studies within those parameters can determine whether or not the cases described can be transferred or generalized to other settings (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Another method of enhancing a study's transferability is the use of multiple sources of data. Data from different sources can be used to corroborate, elaborate, or illuminate the research in question (Rossman & Wilson, 1985). Designing a study with multiple informants or more than one data gathering technique greatly strengthens the usefulness of the research.

The third construct proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is dependability, in which the researcher attempts to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon being studied as well as changes in the design created by a constantly refined understanding of the setting. The researcher must assume a view of the social world as constantly changing and therefore the concept of replication is problematic.

The final construct of confirmability, proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is a way of ensuring the researcher's objectivity. A researcher must gain some understanding or sympathy for the participants to gain entry into their world. The researcher's insights will increase the likelihood that he/she will be able to describe the complex social system being researched. However, the researcher must provide controls for bias in interpretation. Marshall and Rossman (1989) provide us with these controls which include the following:

1. research partners or persons who play "devil's advocate" and critically question the researcher's analyses,
2. a constant search for negative instances,
3. checking and rechecking the data and purposeful testing of rival hypotheses,

4. asking questions of the data, and
5. conducting an audit of the data collection and analytic methods.

For the purposes of this study, the accuracy of the observations and the trustworthiness of this investigation were enhanced by the use of:

1. **Tape recording and field notes.** Tape recorded interviews and field notes allowed the researcher to examine and clarify information. It was a way of assuring completeness and faithfulness to the informants' words. As mentioned before, transcriptions of recorded interviews as well as researchers' hypotheses were shared with the informants for further feedback. While some informants revised their interview transcriptions in front of the researchers, other informants preferred to review their interview transcriptions at home. Nonetheless, most of the informants discussed their interview transcriptions with the researchers. According to Schoepfle and Werner (1982) "all ethnographer's observations must be submitted to comments by the natives" (p. 260). These authors' believe that "observations become bona fide ethnographic data only after being given to consultants for comments" (p. 261).
2. **Photography.** Pictures were used to document and study specific situations and/or settings that required more than a single viewing.
3. **Triangulation between methods, depth of detail, and continuous cross-checking for accuracy.** Galton and Delamont (1985) describe triangulation between methods as "using different research methods to surround, or get a grip on, a particular problem" (p. 168). During this investigation, observations of informants in various settings; interviews with informants; teachers, relatives, and others; document review; and photography among other methods, procedures, and strategies were used to ensure accuracy. In addition, to establish and maintain high data quality, all recorded data was monitored. For instance, every day, field notes from observations and interviews were reviewed and expanded or corrected as necessary. If doubts about the data arose during the reviews, plans were made to record additional data to clarify or replace the inadequate material.
4. **Researcher's journal or personal log and a calendar of day-to-day activities.** All researchers kept journals during most parts of the fieldwork. Due to time constraints, the entries to the journal were sporadic. This means that entries were not systematic. This journal or diary had a cathartic purpose for some researchers. It helped one researcher to deal with her emotions during fieldwork. Sanjek (1990) indicates that "diaries record the ethnographer's personal reactions, frustrations, and assessments of life and work in the field" (p. 108).
5. **Debriefing.** Along this investigation, conversations were held with co-workers at the NRC/GT not involved in the research project as well as peer researchers in parallel projects, in order to explore ideas, doubts, and for personal support. These conversations took place in various places and occasions. For instance, conversations were carried out in the office of the NRC/GT, fast-food restaurants, and on the phone. In addition, self-debriefing using a tape recorder was used during this investigation.

Summary

The complex features of achievement and underachievement among high ability students in an urban setting were examined through a multiple methods approach using qualitative methodology. Observing and talking were the main avenues to gain "in-depth" knowledge of the problem of underachievement among high ability students and to probe the high school experiences of the achieving students. Understanding achievement among high ability students required a very close look at what the students themselves know and how they define their actions. The students were considered the inside experts, although, further information from families, relatives, friends, school personnel, and community members complemented the picture. In this study, data collection and analysis occurred concurrently. In other words, while collecting data, the researchers were developing and verifying explanations. Ethnographic results are discussed in Chapter 4, case study analyses results are presented in Chapter 5, and the results of the cross-case grounded theory analyses are presented in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, a synthesis of the results of all methods is presented and the research questions which guided the study are discussed and compared with the literature.

CHAPTER 4: Ethnographic Results of the High School Environment

A Description of South Central High School in Centerfield

From a distance, the Centerfield skyscrapers with their glistening silver towers overlooked South Central High School with its graffiti-marred exterior and weeds growing through the cracks of its asphalt grounds. The school was located at 400 Washington Avenue, a main thoroughfare in an urban city in the Northeastern section of the United States. Washington Avenue stretched for miles into the downtown area and eventually led to the surrounding historical neighborhood which was still well-preserved for tourists visiting this city.

Sections of this busy street near the high school were lined with dilapidated two-story apartment buildings, gas stations, package stores, and barrooms. In stark contrast to these establishments were stately Victorian buildings which had once been the homes of Centerfield's finest citizens. These elaborate buildings now housed the offices of many well-established law firms.

The South Central High section of town was the home of generations of Italian families. Parallel to Washington Avenue was a major street lined with Italian bakeries, grocery stores, restaurants, and coffee shops catering to the older generations of Italians who had remained dedicated to their simple "South End" neighborhoods. In early morning hours, or late afternoon elderly Italian women, dressed in black mourning dresses and scarves, were often seen shopping along Jefferson Avenue.

The urban high school with its metallic brown structure may appear awesome to a visitor. The four story high building which housed 1,656 students and a faculty and staff of 200 was shaped in an architectural style of the 1970s which enabled very few windows to be installed. Without the name of the school on the front of the building, a passerby might have mistaken it for an industrial plant. Opened in 1974, South Central High had a "twin" at North Central High School, which had opened the same year. South Central was built at an estimated cost of $11.3 million and covered 292,500 square feet. The building included a 1,000 seat auditorium, and a large athletic complex known as the "Doc Sullivan Field House" which included a gymnasium and an Olympic-size swimming pool. The field house, named in honor of a beloved baseball coach and community leader from generations past, was attached to the main part of the building, facing visitors to South Central High School as they arrived in the back parking lot. All visitors who entered from the rear of the building were also greeted by an oversized furnace and smoke stack from which ominous dark smoke poured out every morning.

At 7:00 a.m., the main hallway on the second floor of the building smelled of fresh coffee brewing behind the serving line in the faculty dining room. Students with disabilities stood with white aprons and smiled behind the cash register and made change as teachers bought coffee and Dunkin' Donuts (which were delivered daily to the high school). Later in the morning, the corridor smelled of garlic or other heavy seasonings used to add flavor to the hot cafeteria lunches.

Some students entered the building early at 7:15 a.m., walking slowly from both ends of Washington Avenue or arriving in school buses which pulled into the back parking lot. By 7:35 a.m., the outside bell rings announcing to the students that they may officially enter the building to be greeted by stairwells painted in dark brown. The walls of the stairwells have a patchwork paint effect. In several areas, the brown walls had been painted

over with squares of bright red or black paint. Apparently, graffiti artists were known to strike and the South Central High custodial staff developed a system of dealing with the problem with a colorful paint roller. However, the custodians were less successful with windows, for graffiti was plastered across sections of the stairwell windows in the building and included a variety of colorful and offensive expressions.

Past the graffiti-infested stairwells, students found themselves in a modern, clean environment. The linoleum floors of the building sparkled with a high quality wax coating. The walls of the corridors and classrooms were painted in a muted shade of light green or beige and each classroom door was designated by 24 inch numbers painted in bright shades of red, green, and yellow. Student lockers throughout the building were a lively shade of orange. Bright, overhead lighting was recessed into the ceilings and provided a well illuminated atmosphere. On each floor were traditional classrooms in square and rectangular shapes with straight rows or U-shaped arrangements of desks. Classrooms were occasionally decorated with inspirational or academic posters as well as bulletin boards where announcements and class assignments might be posted.

At 7:42 a.m., the corridor bell indicated that students should go to their homerooms by 7:45 a.m. the tardy bell rang. During homeroom, the school news was announced over the loud speakers. Sometimes the principal, Mrs. D'Agostino, started the day with a cheerful greeting to the students. She congratulated the selected student scholar of the month and reminded students of special upcoming events. In addition, a student imitating Robin Williams in the movie "Good Morning, Vietnam" announced the daily news and invited peers to enjoy their day. Academic periods started at 7:58 a.m.

The first floor housed the music department, special education classrooms, the industrial and graphic arts labs, and art classrooms. The automotive technology department was housed in a small separate building adjacent to the high school and an in-house detention center was also located in that building. Administrative offices were situated on the second floor along with the guidance offices, the cafeteria, and a large open lounge area overlooking the school's swimming pool and gymnasium. The third and fourth floors held classrooms and the library-media center. Faculty lounges and teachers' work rooms were located throughout the third and fourth floors.

Arriving at South Central High School always involved meeting a security guard or two in the parking lot or the corridors. Security guards were usually heavy set men and women dressed in official looking navy blue uniforms with shoulder patches designating their position in the school. They carried walkie talkies at all times and their equipment could be heard as they patrolled the hallways. The high school's four vice principals also were seen every day in the hallways carrying walkie talkies. They communicated with each other as they walked throughout the building, always on guard for any suspicious looking characters who were not welcome.

The four vice principals were highly visible in the building. The school's executive vice principal was Mr. Strong, a short, muscular, African American with a receding hairline balanced by a long, black beard. He was always impeccably dressed in designer suits and could be heard loudly delivering the following messages as he walked the hallways: "Where are you supposed to be?" "Alright! Let's get to class!" and "The tardy bell is about to ring. Let's get moving!" He was also seen with his arm around a student's shoulders quietly asking a question such as, "Is that any kind of language for a young man to be using?"

Mr. Kresinsky, a thin, White, gray-haired man with a somber, wrinkled brow darted up and down the hallways with his trusty clipboard and always appeared to be on the move.

The rookie of the group was Mr. Laverdierre, a White man with a perpetual smile who was built like a defensive football player and he lumbered down the corridors at a slow pace. The least experienced administrator with the South Central High School discipline system, students reported that he may have looked like a big teddy bear, but "he went by the books." The fourth administrator, Mr. Perez, a tall, dignified Hispanic man with salt and pepper hair, traveled at a fast pace, spoke Spanish rapidly, and was often seen interpreting for Hispanic parents who were newcomers to the building.

For all visitors, the first stop was the second floor main office which housed the principal's office as well as an information center and other administrative offices. When entering the building through the main front entrance to get to the main office, a visible welcome sign in various languages and displaying flags from various countries could be appreciated. In front of the main office, an old glass and wood cabinet displayed the trophies and medals earned by the South Central High School athletic teams throughout the years. Posters, announcements, letters addressed to students, teachers, or other school personnel were exhibited in the front glass wall of the main office. For instance, a letter from a private industry thanking the principal for a lecture, and another letter from the city thanking art students for their magnificent art work during a Christmas project were among the many other visuals on display.

Once in the main office, visitors, faculty, and staff were requested to sign a daily attendance/visit sheet. If assistance was needed, bilingual secretaries and student clerical aids were available for help. A few minutes here allowed an observer to appreciate the complexity of a regular work day at this busy office. The principal, running from one office to the other talking to herself, a secretary typing a letter for the principal, a student clerical aid helping a student with a question, another student clerical aid answering a phone call, while the other secretary helped a mother who was asked to attend a special education referral meeting today but did not know how to get to the assigned room, were samples of an everyday scene.

The principal of the school was a short, heavy-set woman in her mid-forties. Mrs. D'Agostino, who always dressed in brightly colored dresses or suits, covered considerable territory in the course of her day, and could be seen in classrooms, the media center, the administrative offices, or in the corridors. She smiled constantly, and stopped and chatted with all students. She knew most of them by name and was stopped by some who requested a quick hug or a kiss on the cheek.

Leaving the principal's office and approaching the second floor corridor at any time of the school day, food smells permeated. Every morning from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., the smell of fresh brewed coffee and Dunkin' Donuts lured faculty and staff into the faculty dining room. Here, Gina, a sixty-eight year old lady, and Johnny, a smiling fifteen year old student, received their clients standing behind the cash register. After 10:00 a.m., it was no surprise that people started to feel hungry because of the smell of garlic and other spices used to season the hot cafeteria lunches. Besides the main office, faculty dining room, and cafeteria, the second floor houses the nurse's room, data room, vice-principal offices, staff room, guidance offices, a large open lounge area overlooking the school's swimming pool and gymnasium, two classrooms and the large group instruction (LGI) room commonly used for special activities and study halls.

As students arrived at school, they congregated in the cafeteria—the North and South Commons area—and chatted with friends in a multitude of languages, until a bell rang for homeroom. It was then that another day officially began at South Central High. The following scenes provide a portrait of various places, persons, and events that typify daily life at South Central High School.

The Guidance Office

As did the main office, the main guidance office had a constant flow of students, parents, visitors, teachers, and counselors. "Excuse me, yo soy nueva y tengo dos schedules. ¿Qué hago?" ["Excuse me, I am new and I have two different schedules. What should I do?"] asks a newly registered Puerto Rican freshman girl of the guidance office secretary. A few seconds later, "Petra!, Process the paperwork as a new arrival for this student," and "Petra! Did you finish typing the master schedule?" yelled Mr. Dabrowski, the chairperson of the guidance department at South Central High School. Mr. Dabrowski was a short, red-faced man in his mid-fifties who was always extremely busy and was constantly moving between his office and his secretary's desk. Phone calls, paperwork, meetings with his staff of eight counselors, appointments with parents, students, or strangers, and unexpected situations confronted him every day.

Mrs. Petra Ramos, a Puerto Rican secretary, was seated at her desk in the entrance of the guidance office as she assisted an Upward Bound Program representative from a nearby private college. Suddenly they were interrupted, "Petra! Do we have more SAT instruction booklets?" asked Mr. Taylor, a well-known and loved African American counselor at this high school. Students described him as a "father" with a loving personality. A few minutes later, "Petra! Can you help to get information about Louis Dipetrie?" asked one counselor. "I will call the data room," answers Mrs. Ramos. The data room was an open work room where daily attendance, grade status, schedules, academic progress, and other information were available to teachers and other school personnel.

The walls of the two guidance offices at South Central High School were covered with academic posters and flyers announcing scholarships, college open houses, the job corps program, student exchange programs, career choices, and colleges. Magazines such as *Career and Colleges, Career Success, Trends and The Minority Students' College Guide: Multicultural Opportunities*, and others are also available to students. In front of the main guidance office, an electronic board announced deadlines and opportunities for students.

Mr. Dabrowski, shook his head, pulled at his necktie, and walked away, carrying a large pile of paper and computer printouts. He turned and said:

> We need a stronger discipline system. The population of this school can't understand anything else. They have no structure at home. They have no structure on the streets. This is the only place where they can feel safe, loved, cared for, and secure. This high school is a great deal for some of these kids. They have heat, a pleasant environment, great cafeteria meals, better than they're getting at home, that is, if they're eating at home at all. They need to have someone who is an adult who's in control. They need to feel that school is one place where they don't have to worry about survival. They have enough survival problems elsewhere in their lives. The population here and the neighborhood has changed so much since I was first here twenty-five years ago. Years ago, it was sixty-five percent Polish, Irish, and Italian blue collar families living in this end of the city. It's really changed.

These words expressed his feeling about things in general as he began his twenty-sixth year as chairperson of the guidance department at South Central High School. He was not looking forward to the coming year as his department had suffered the blow of budget cuts handed down by the Board of Education the previous spring. This year he was "down one counselor" at South Central and would be responsible for overseeing the guidance departments of all three city high schools in Centerfield. With his overworked

staff of eight counselors, and feeling overwhelmed by his additional responsibilities, he explained, with a smile, that he was grateful for his wife "who's the only one who's been forced to listen to me."

During the morning he interviewed an Asian male in the hallway of the guidance office concerning the young man's previous educational experiences in Vietnam. He chatted with the young man's older brother, and it became apparent that a communication problem existed. He excused himself and said, "Let me call Mr. Lee." Several minutes later, a short, friendly, middle-aged Asian man entered the guidance office and began to translate for the newcomer from Vietnam. Mr. Lee had left his algebra class for a short time and was able explain to the guidance counselor that the young man was twenty years old, had completed the eighth grade and wanted to enter the ninth grade at South Central High School. Mr. Dabrowski turned to Mrs. Ramos, a Puerto Rican secretary seated at her desk in the entry of the guidance office, and said, "Petra! Process the paperwork as a new arrival. He'll need the bilingual program." He thanked Mr. Lee, who returned to his classroom, and the guidance office secretary began to process the necessary paperwork.

Shortly after, two tall young men, speaking excitedly in Polish, arrived to see their guidance counselor. When questioned as to whether they were exchange students, Mr. Dabrowski, smiled and explained, "We're the United Nations here. No, they're not exchange students. We have a Polish teacher who teaches science and social science in Polish." Mr. Dabrowski explained that the multicultural student body at South Central was a transient population, as over 500 students typically transferred in or out of the high school during an academic year:

> That's one third of our population! I tell that to counselors from other high schools and they can never believe it. We deal with a lot of different issues in the city. We have to plan on a lot of "no shows" in September. Try planning programs when you know that one third of your kids will come and go! It's extremely difficult to determine course offerings when you don't know who will be here.

Another counselor approached the guidance office secretary for help as she was searching for some information on a student named Marc. Mrs. Ramos took the phone receiver, smiled knowingly, and said, "I was asking the kids a few days ago if anyone had seen him. I understand he may have left. I'll call the data room." She chatted on the phone with personnel in another office, "Can you do me a big favor? Can you tell me if a student is still here? He was on the active rolls on September 17th." She learned that the young man had transferred to a Catholic private high school in the city and passed that information on to the teacher.

Paraprofessionals in the data room at South Central High handled these types of questions every day throughout the school year. The data room was a large open work room situated near the main office of the high school. There, one could find answers to many questions regarding the daily attendance of students, their grade status, schedules and schedule changes, academic progress, disciplinary offenses, and much more. Four women spent their work day at desks and large tables covered with computer printouts and entered student data into the school's computers in an attempt to keep track of the 1,656 students enrolled at South Central. The data room was constantly visited by teachers, administrators, counselors, and other staff members in search of information about students, schedules, or attendance records.

Along with questions about the young man named Marc who had transferred to a private high school, a member of the staff questioned Mrs. Ramos about what had happened to a young man named Moises Ortiz. This student had been absent for several weeks and

the teacher wanted to know what was happening with this intelligent young man, who was, he explained, one of his more able students. Mrs. Ramos pursued the question with her connection in the data room and learned that he had not been present in his homeroom for over two weeks. She ended the phone conversation, turned to the teacher and explained, "He's a junior. He's not in today. He has two kids. His girlfriend just had a second baby by him." She sighed as she said, "He has his hands full. He's only sixteen and he has two children."

A White male and female stepped out of another guidance counselor's office arm in arm and returned to their classes giggling. Their counselor stood in the doorway of his office and commented to his colleague across the hall.

> They're too intense for me. It behooves them to consider whether other people are watching them. They were using only one chair outside your office for a purpose! They get themselves in a relationship like that and it's too much for them to handle. They expect us to bail them out. It's like he just discovered something new!

Mrs. D'Agostino entered the office and greeted everyone there with a friendly smile. Standing next to her was a young Asian female who was new to the school. Mrs. D'Agostino turned to the young woman and said, "We are going to the nurse now. Can you say that? NURSE! Do you know what that means? NURSE!" She turned a file folder over to Mrs. Ramos for processing and explained, "She's a new arrival from North Central." Taking the young girl by the arm, she escorted the new student to the nurse's office.

Courses, Programs, and Clubs

"We don't have enough classes for all of these students" was a common complaint heard among South Central High School guidance counselors who constantly looked for space for new students, only to find that some of the classes that they thought were filled had space available because of dropouts. The courses and programs of the high school are listed in Table 2.

Study Halls as Warehouses

> I hate to sound pessimistic but you have to realize we are warehousing here. Yes, we're warehousing kids. Our study halls are the warehouses where we keep kids in storage. We don't have enough classes to put them in, so we have to keep them in study halls.

This discouraged guidance counselor explained the warehouses was one way of dealing with budget cuts. Students at South Central needed alternatives, and yet the staff was discouraged by the fact they had to schedule young people into study halls where little happened. Study halls were held in several classrooms, a small auditorium known as the LGI, or the cafeteria referred to as the North and South Commons area.

Table 2

Course Offerings at South Central High School

Department	Areas	Courses
Art	Drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture, ceramics, crafts	12
Bilingual Education	Bilingual Spanish, ESOL, Polish, math, history, civics, science	39
Business	Typing, keyboarding, word processing, accounting, computerized record keeping, consumerism, law, marketing, notetaking	18
English	English—general, academic & honors levels—speech, acting, composition, journalism, urban literature & classics, film study	27
Foreign Language	Russian, French, Spanish, Italian	29
Life Management	Food and nutrition, fashion technology, leisure activities, creative living, residential housing & interiors, child development, marriage & family, health careers	14
Technology Education	Wood, graphic arts, electronics, drafting, residential construction	30
Mathematics	Remedial math, statistics, problem solving, algebra, geometry, consumer math, pre-calculus, calculus, trigonometry, computer programming and languages	24
Music	Concert choir, band, music theory, performing arts, guitar, piano, instrumental ensemble, brass	12
Physical & Health Education	Physical fitness, individual, & dual sports, aquatics, team sports	5 (males) 5 (females)

(table continues)

Table 2 *(continued)*

Course Offerings at South Central High School

Department	Areas	Courses
Science	Basic & general science, earth science, geology, astronomy, meteorology, oceanography, biology, physiology, anatomy, environmental science, chemistry, physics, epidemiology	19
Social Studies	Civics, Puerto Rican history, world history, geography, African studies, Latin American studies, minority studies, sociology, anthropology, economics, U.S. history, law, psychology	19
Reading		9
Special Education	English, reading, math, social living and vocational skills, civics, U.S. history, science	19
Occupational Education	English, math, social studies, science, human dynamics, others . . .	13
Vocational Education	Volunteer work experience, work study, engine repair, automotive technology, auto body repair, advanced career training, tech prep	9
Other programs	Classical Magnet School-Centerfield Public High School, Greater Centerfield Academy of Performing Arts, New Arrivals	NA

In the cafeteria study halls, students sat at dilapidated tables covered with graffiti and entertained themselves in a number of ways. At the head of the large open room sat paraprofessionals—usually middle aged women known to the students as the "paras." These women spent their days supervising study halls and assisting in the offices or tutoring students in remedial programs. The cafeteria was unusual since it was one room at South Central High School with windows. These windows overlooked downtown Washington Avenue. Though covered with spray painted graffiti, anyone seated in the cafeteria could see what was happening in front of the school. Often, patrons of Tommy's Café or Rivera's Market across the street would provide the students with interesting scenarios to watch.

On the right wall of the cafeteria was a large painting of the school mascot—a maroon and white bulldog with a caption that read "South Central High Bulldogs." The bulldog had been painted by a student artist from an earlier graduating class and was marred by graffiti, scrawled in black magic marker, which read "AME & Julie '92," "Chia Dog was here!" and "Crip, Rock, Bly-Bly, and Johnny G."

A new feature to the school cafeteria provided an interesting dimension to the scene. An electronic bulletin board had been installed above the windows looking out onto Washington Avenue. Bright red letters appeared as the following message flashed continuously across the screen.

> Bulldogs. 'Make Your Own Message' is now open for business. Buy your ad during 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 9th period in front of the Main Office. A limited amount of messages can be displayed. First come! First served!

On one day, 13 students were seated in the room. Several Hispanic young women sat and applied makeup with the use of their compact mirrors. Another student was slouched over a table, napping. Other students simply sat and stared out the window overlooking Washington Avenue. After an eruption of noise from one table of young men, the paraprofessional hóllered, "Rafael, what do you have to do? Jesús, what do you have to do?" The young men responded with, "Math!," waved to the woman and returned to their conversation. The woman responded by crying out, "You're too loud!"

Norman, a heavy set young man known to everyone in the study hall for his daily antics, walked up to the paraprofessional at the front table, carrying a copy of the local newspaper and asked, "Excuse me, ma'am, but do you have a pair of scissors?" The woman replied, "What do you think I am? If I had everything everybody needed, I'd have to come here with a suitcase!" Norman returned to his table and as he did, he hollered at full volume, "Everybody shut up! This class isn't over yet!"

On another morning, a young blonde female, dressed in tightly fitting jeans and wearing heavy makeup, approached the same "para" and asked for a calculator. Norman and his friends commented on the appearance of the young woman. The paraprofessional turned to the group and asked, "What's your problem today?" Jesús laughed and replied, "He's sugar high!" He giggled and began to sing the theme song from the television show, *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood.* "It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood! It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood!" The table of young men erupted in laughter. The "para" in charge started to busy herself with helping the young woman find a calculator. Together, they walked over to a table of Asian students busy working on homework. The woman attempted to explain to a young Asian female that the other young woman wanted to borrow her calculator. She asked, "Where's your picture book?" The Asian student pulled out a manual from her school backpack and handed it to the woman. The "para" flipped to the back index and eventually located a picture of a calculator in the large vocabulary picture book. She pointed to the picture and said, "That's it! Calculator! Now say it after me." The Asian student repeated the word, reached for her calculator and handed it to the blonde girl. The blonde student slowly walked back to her table, tossed her head back, and poured an envelope of sugared candy down her throat. The Asian female watched this young blonde woman's behavior with a confused look on her face. She smiled nervously and returned to her math problems.

As the young woman and her Asian peers worked on their assignment, another eruption came from the other side of the Commons.

"Norman! What's your problem?"

"You've got the problem, not me!"

"Now, cut that out, young man!"

Students at the table next to Norman laughed loudly and started to make loud clucking sounds. They pointed to Norman and called out, "You belong in kindergarten!" Norman responded with a loud, "So do you!" He turned to the woman in charge of the study hall and requested permission to go to the office to get another lunch ticket. He left the room.

On any given morning, the North Commons area in which the study halls were located were filled with pleasant aromas coming from the cafeteria's kitchen. As soon as the bell rang signaling the end of a period, the study hall was transformed into a lunchroom as the doors from the kitchen's serving area opened and out poured hungry teenagers with lunch trays. At various corners of the room appeared the school's security guards, dressed in their navy blue uniforms and carrying their walkie talkies. The "warehouse" suddenly became a social center where students enjoyed a hot meal or the contents of brown bag lunches prepared at home.

The Faculty Dining Hall

At the beginning of a school day, Mrs. D'Agostino's voice came over the loudspeaker, congratulating the four newly elected sophomore class officers who were all Hispanic females. Other morning announcements consisted of reminders to students of upcoming visits from college recruiters to South Central High. She concluded with, "The Halloween Dance has been canceled due to lack of interest."

It was 10:45 a.m. and the only people in the dining room were the security guards who were quietly eating during their morning break. People in the kitchen talked, laughed and made noises with pots. A closer examination provided the opportunity to view the students' drawings and paintings that embellished this room. Individual and group tables plus a sofa facing the glass windows overlooking Washington Avenue furnished this room. A peaceful atmosphere prevailed. By 11:15 a.m. the scene started to change as student-teachers from the State University sat together to share their experiences. A Hispanic teacher seated alone was joined by two Hispanic male teachers who began to talk about various topics such as the best pill for headaches, the difficulty some Spanish speaking students have in understanding jokes in English, and some other students' issues. A cooperating teacher discussed a class plan with her student-teacher. Not far away, a science teacher was interviewed by a college representative while having lunch. After 12:50 p.m., the faculty dining room was rarely used except for one or two teachers who stayed to finish paperwork or read students' work.

A faculty member seated in the teachers' lounge responded to the news about the Halloween dance while sipping her coffee said, "They have so many other things going on in the streets or at home that a dance just doesn't bring them in." She sighed.

At another table in the lounge were two female teachers chatting quietly. One woman remarked:

> Is he one of yours? There is a PPT scheduled on him. She is looking at outside placement. He's dangerous in any kind of class with machinery. He is dangerous

> even in an English class with a paper and pencil. He has problems with his peers. He needs more than we can give him.

A group of younger teachers were seated not too far away. A female physical education teacher dressed in an athletic warm up suit announced:

> So I came upstairs. I got security. All they told them to do was move along! These were big kids. Why don't they send them to the office? I'm not risking my life anymore!

Later in the conversation, another teacher in the group complained about the attendance system.

> This student, Wanda Sanchez, she started the school year on my roster. She never showed up. She's been on the active list ever since September 5th. I gave her a grade of F with 0 days. She appears in my class today! I took over the course on the 15th of October. I haven't seen her before today. What am I supposed to do? Who's her vice principal? Will he be pleased to see me! I want to know what we're supposed to do with these kids!

The teachers at her table smiled knowingly and suggested that she see the guidance office staff. Later in the morning, several of the school's security guards were seated in the lounge enjoying their morning coffee break. One was overheard saying:

> Document the fight. I talked with the guy from the ambulance company. He told me about a situation where someone was asked, 'Why was she brought here to this detox center?' and he answered, 'She had to be restrained.' That conversation being documented saved his ass! Everyone is suing these days. Big Time! Remember, keep a record of who was in the fight and what happened. Otherwise, it will come back to haunt you.

Football on Saturday

It was a brisk November Saturday afternoon and the South Central High School Bulldogs were scheduled to meet their arch rivals, the North Central High Blue Devils, in a football game. The local stadium was several blocks behind the South Central campus and could accommodate crowds of several thousand people. Approximately 200 fans were in attendance on each side of the field. The sparsely filled bleachers were scattered with former South Central football players who lived locally. They could be recognized by their maroon and white jackets which read "South Central Class LL Finalist 1991." Last year's team had enjoyed a winning season, but the Bulldogs were not experiencing that same success this year.

Across the field, the North Central band was in uniform while the South Central musicians were not. Both musical groups of approximately 30 students struggled to fill the almost empty stadium with peppy fight songs. The South Central High cheerleaders were dressed in new uniforms and were accompanied by a six foot mascot dressed like a Bulldog. Together the cheerleaders and their mascot attempted to get the small crowd of supporters to join them in cheers for South Central. The young women chanted and the dedicated fans replied with "Bulldogs!" as Hispanic accents could be heard throughout the lively exchange. From the clubhouse overlooking the South Central bleachers hung a banner with a spray painted message announcing, "Bulldogs will get their bone!"

The four vice principals from South Central were in attendance and were dressed in sporty fall clothing walking around the perimeter of the football field. Mrs. D'Agostino, dressed in baggy bluejeans and a maroon football jacket from last year's South Central championship season, was also in the stands cheering on her Bulldog family. Several faculty members were in attendance and the South Central High security guards were on duty that afternoon as they watched the game and held onto their walkie talkies. Two Centerfield police officers stood by the gates of the stadium.

It began to rain and supporters from both sides of the field left early. The game ended in victory for the Blue Devils. When asked about the day's turnout, a Centerfield police officer explained, "The kids have not really come out today!" He continued, "I don't understand where the community is either. These kids don't get the support they should."

Gang Activity

> It's in the building. We have some very active gang members here. . . . We're going to be hit more often because we are the city high school with the most diversity. Some of my friends want me to join the Latin Queens. Now, they're like saying 'come on, you'll have much more respect than you do.'

The gang problem was getting increasingly worse. On February 25, only a few minutes after the dismissal bell signaled the end of the school day, South Central High School was "hit" by a gang-related incident. Ten minutes before the dismissal bell, several students approached the school executive vice-principal alerting him about a group of gang members that were waiting for some students to fight in front of the school. Immediately, Mr. Strong called the police; however, there was not enough time for the police to get to the school before the dismissal bell rang. Security guards and vice principals had to deal with the situation by themselves until the police appeared. An exchange of words and light physical contact occurring between gang members and the school personnel resulted in slight injuries to Mr. Strong. Finally, two police cars and the anti-gang task force with a paddy wagon surrounded and arrested the unwelcome gang members.

Mr. Crocker, a guidance counselor at South Central High School, known for his fun loving personality, entered the office one morning waving a bright red bandana he had picked up from the floor of the school corridor. He announced jokingly, "There's been some gang activity going on here. If it's red, it must belong to the Latin Kings."

Another counselor who was standing at the copying machine piped in:

> Is it the 'Latin Kings' or 'Los Solidos'? I can never remember which colors the gangs are claiming. I can't keep up with the changing colors. They're always changing their styles. I was reading in the paper a few days ago about how one gang is no longer wearing bandanas. They're using beads instead. The color of the beads is supposed to tell you which gang they're in.

Mrs. Ramos, the guidance office secretary laughed and said,

> Do you remember the "South Side Posse." They were always getting beaten up. They were always getting into fights. They were always getting their butts whipped! They had big mouths. That's about all they had.

The guidance office staff chuckled together as they continued with their work. Mr. Crocker approached Mrs. Ramos' desk and began to hang the bandana from the glass enclosure surrounding her work area. He said, "I'll leave this here so the kids know where you stand."

Mrs. Ramos laughed heartily, rolled her eyes, and commented on her possible membership in one of the gangs, "What do you think they'd have me do for my initiation?" This casual attitude towards the gangs belied the underlying problems with gangs which had intensified in the geographic area around the school as the year progressed. By the Christmas holidays, the gang problem had also intensified inside the school as one teacher explained:

> Yesterday, a boy was badly beaten. The gangs are solidifying. The faculty is on a special red alert. That means we have to be more visible patrolling the halls. Yesterday the police were here with the paddywagons, the whole bit.

Mrs. D'Agostino was seen throughout the corridors on the day following the incident. She was dressed in sandals and wore red, white, and green striped socks. Faculty and students were enjoying her holiday ensemble and commented as they passed by. She greeted each and every student and had a reason for doing so, "I question the ones who don't look me in the eyes. Those who don't recognize me are the ones I have to ask for identification. They're not supposed to be in the building." She went on to explain that the gang problem was getting increasingly worse.

The issue of gangs appeared to be affecting a variety of populations in the school. Victoria, an attractive Puerto Rican young woman and a member of the senior class explained:

> I used to date a guy who was in [gang]. He signed up with them in jail. He used to tell me stuff. . . . The [gang] wear yellow and black beads and [gang], they wear red and blue beads. You can usually point them out, a lot of girls and a lot of guys. It's not only boys, it's girls too. Last week, two of those girls got arrested with [gang]. They go to this school. They were found with three thousand dollars and cocaine on them. I laughed! I can't stand those girls anyways. Just because they're in a gang, they think they're so big!

The problem with gangs intensified during the two and a half years of data collection connected with this study. One morning, a large gang insignia had been drawn in a snow bank in the back parking lot of the school for the entire student body to see as they arrived on school buses. Later in the winter, gang warfare affected the South Central High School student body and staff as a drive-by shooting took place in front of the high school. No one was harmed but students explained the event as a warning from one warring gang to another. The Centerfield police patrolled Washington Avenue for several days following the incident. Visitors to the building were advised to always enter and exit the building from the back, since drive-by shootings in the past had always taken place in front of the school.

"Winter Wonderland," A Holiday Concert

The faculty chaperone at the door of the auditorium smiled and assured the researcher who had arrived late, "I hardly think you will be interrupting a thing." "Winter Wonderland," the holiday season concert, had started and a three-piece ensemble was concluding a selection. The modern auditorium, which seated 700, had approximately 100

people in attendance. Many of the members of the audience were young, impoverished looking children who may have seen the sparkling lights on at South Central and wandered in off the streets of Centerfield. Throughout the performance, these young people were told to be quiet by a parent of one of the students on stage.

The stage's backdrop was colorfully decorated with silhouettes of Nutcracker-style drummers and holiday wreaths designed by students in art classes. An artificial Christmas tree complete with wrapped packages underneath stood on one corner of the stage and at the opposite side of the stage was a large baby grand piano.

Following the three-piece ensemble, the chorus arrived with its director, Mrs. Sawyer, a dignified African American woman, beautifully dressed in a black dress and matching heels, and wearing an elegant coiffure. She turned to the audience and proclaimed in surprise, "Oh my! A full house!" The audience giggled lightly. Mrs. Sawyer acknowledged former South Central High music students who were seated in the audience and welcomed them home from college or the military. Standing behind her on rafters were the twenty members of her chorus, all of them African American or Hispanic. The group sang a number of songs with powerful sounding voices as they swayed back and forth in the African tradition. Several songs performed were African in origin and the singers were rewarded with enthusiastic applause.

Following the choral performance, Santa Claus arrived and entertained the audience by calling out "Ho! Ho! Ho! Merry Christmas!" and tossing candy to the families seated in the auditorium. Santa Claus received a strong reaction from the audience when they realized Santa was none other than Mrs. D'Agostino!

The second half of the concert consisted of numbers played by the school band with Mr. Kovetsky directing. The band concert was uneventful until the final number when halfway through a selection, the director stopped the band members from playing and had them attempt to play the selection again. This happened twice. He then turned to the audience and said, "I apologize. This should not happen at a concert. They are unable to play this selection. This should not be. I am sorry. We will have to conclude the concert here. Thank you for coming." The band members walked off the stage and the audience quietly left the auditorium. Comments from audience members could be heard as they left the building. One student said, "Oooohh! He's mad. Are they gonna' get it! They're all walking straight back into the locker room. Are they gonna' get it tonight! They're gonna' hear about it tomorrow, too!"

The Pep Rally

February 5 was a day that many students at South Central High eagerly anticipated. Early in the morning, cheerleaders with their sporty-looking attire could be seen around the school. The pep rally represented an opportunity to celebrate the athletic spirit of the school. By noon, all the students were in the gym, organized by graduation class. Teachers, counselors, paraprofessionals, and security guards carefully watched the student body. "Let's go sophomores, let's go sophomores, let's go sophomores!" cheered a group of students in one corner while being hissed by another group of students in front of them. Students were involved and excited as the school band played the "National Anthem" and the enthusiasm was obvious as the loud applause resonated through the audience. The school athletic teams were introduced and each graduation class displayed special support for its team members. Mr. Strong announced ". . . if you don't know how to behave during this kind of activity, then you should not be part of South Central High School." The pep

rally continued and attractive girls from different cultural backgrounds performed a hip-hop dance. Students sang and moved in their own seats and after an hour of healthy, safe, fun, students were dismissed.

The Swim Meet With Middlefield

It was a mid-winter school vacation but the "Doc Sullivan Field House" was filled with excitement. The South Central High boys' swim team was to compete against Middlefield High School, an affluent suburban school from the shore. This meet was crucial in determining which school would advance to the state championships for the records of both teams were evenly matched. The air was filled with tension.

The swim team at South Central consisted of 50 young men from all four grade levels who were very dedicated to Coach Brogan. A man in his late forties, he stood quietly at poolside dressed in white tennis shorts and a white polo shirt. His men stood beside him along the perimeter of the pool, in their maroon Speedo bathing suits, their tall, lanky bodies glistening from their last dive into the pool's chlorinated water. Senior members of the team were busy setting up and maintaining equipment needed to carry out the swim meet.

The small section of bleachers along one wall of the field house was filled with students and parents of the South Central swimmers who were there to support their "Bullfrogs." Both teams had several swimmers reclined along the sides of the pools, their eyes closed, and tuned into their selected music choices on Sony walkmen in an attempt to either "get psyched" or remain calm about the competition ahead.

The fans were silent as the divers competed and they cheered loudly throughout the events involving speed. The high school swimmers hollered emotionally and followed their competing teammates from the side of the pool. Hugs and heavy slaps on the back for victorious athletes were plentiful throughout the afternoon. The South Central High coach appeared calm by the side of the pool. Above the pool hung a maroon and white felt banner which designated the many years this man had been successful in bringing his teams to the state championships. Middlefield won that day and South Central's Coach Brogan called his men together at one end of the pool and talked with them quietly. Tears were seen streaming down the cheeks of several of the young men.

About Celebrating Excellence

> . . . a challenge to the freshmen, sophomore, junior and senior classes of South Central High School . . . stay together and graduate . . . today we celebrate excellence among the students of this school . . . these students represent hard work . . . there is a recompense in the long run. . . .

At the school auditorium, the Annual Awards Assembly began with an encouraging speech by Mrs. D'Agostino. She was followed by Mr. Dabrowski, who gave a short speech. Shortly after his speech, students' names started to be called out. For the next hour students were recognized for various reasons: perfect attendance, academic achievement, character, and extracurricular involvement. Many students who were involved in this study received awards. Students were classified as top scholars, high honors, honors, members of the Club B (students who achieved a "B" average despite living in the difficult conditions of public project housing in Centerfield), and recipients of book awards, among others. Mrs.

D'Agostino closed the activity, "we are proud of the excellence of this school, celebrate yourself. . . ."

The Heritage Assembly

On May 20, South Central High School sponsored a special event to give two awards during the Heritage Assembly, which celebrated "the great tradition and heritage from which South Central High School has emerged" as Mrs. D'Agostino explained. A male and female from the senior class were recognized for their high standards of integrity, morality, unselfishness of spirit, service, and motivation.

The Gorvin and Felly awards were given in honor of two excellent individuals who devoted themselves to South Central High School. Miss G. Gorvin was an English teacher and Chairwoman of the English department from 1926 until 1966, and Mr. P. Felly was the Head Guidance Counselor from 1926 until 1956. During the assembly, students behaved properly and no major negative reactions were observed. Only a few students were observed laughing and a few jokes were overheard when a counselor explained that he was "excited" about the celebration.

The Learning Resource Center (LRC)

The Learning Resource Center, commonly known as the LRC, was the heart of the high school and a busy place from the time it opened in the morning until the end of the school day. The LRC served the school in many ways as it was a library and media center, the home of a computer classroom, a teacher meeting place, the home of a tutorial program, and a study hall for students serious about getting work done. Students who did not appreciate the environment in the large study halls had developed a daily ritual of asking a teacher for a pass to the LRC to ensure they would have a quiet place to do homework. The LRC had its regulars who could be found there every day during their designated study hall period. In the learning center, these students were seen with their backpacks of textbooks hanging from chairs as they chatted and worked on their assignments at large oak tables.

Entering the LRC, one noticed a large bulletin board, designed with brightly colored construction paper, displaying the work of several high ability students. Five young women selected from Honors English classes had been involved in two different creative writing programs. The bulletin board featured a publication entitled *Listen! Collected Works of the Young Writers' Institute.* Also advertised on the board was a program called "Mentor by Mail" in which the same young women had worked with a published author in perfecting their written essays and poems. Copies of their published work were displayed and accompanied by snapshots of the young authors involved in these special programs. The bulletin board was put up in the LRC in October and remained there until May.

On revolving racks of the LRC were magazines featuring multicultural titles such as *MAS*, an Hispanic teen magazine written in Spanish, along with the usual popular magazines typically found in a high school library. A large antique oak table in front of the circulation desk contained some new reference materials. Volumes entitled *Blacks in Science and Medicine* and *Peoples of the World: The Culture, Geographic Setting and Historical Background of 42 Latin American Peoples* were on display. Several students searched for information in volumes of *Encyclopedia Hispánica* while others attempted to locate information through several of the latest computerized information retrieval systems. A large collection of paperback books nearby included classic American novels, well-worn

copies of romance novels, as well as copies of *Encyclopedia Brown* books, *The Hardy Boys* series, and *Sweet Valley High.*

Along the perimeter of the LRC were small offices and instructional rooms which were used throughout the day. Students and teachers worked in a Macintosh computer lab which was funded through a grant from the nearby major state university. In an adjacent room was an office housing graduate students from the university who worked as tutors throughout the building. The tutors were seated in many corners of the LRC quietly working with individual students. Faculty members regularly were seated in comfortable chairs in a corner of the LRC either reading the local newspaper or grading papers. The LRC served as a gathering place for faculty since many did not have their own classrooms and worked in a transient fashion.

Along the ceiling of the LRC were large faded and yellowed photographs of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, John Kennedy, and Martin Luther King. The collection also included paintings of scenes from United States history and photographs of former South Central High School administrators. These "historical artifacts" may not have been noticed by many from day to day, yet they hung above the modern high school learning center and reminded visitors of the library of simpler days gone by.

The In-House Detention Room

A paraprofessional who was on duty in the in-house detention room explained:

> This is the vocational/agricultural building. This room was used to keep the animals when the agricultural program was still in effect. Now, we use this room for inside suspension. You know, we still keep here the 'animals' [meaning students] here.

Students who received three or more MDOs (Major Disciplinary Offenses), were sent to the in-house detention room from 7:45 a.m. to 1:54 p.m. for a specific number of days as indicated by their vice-principal. Lunch was delivered and eaten in the room. If a student had to use the bathroom facilities, he or she must obtain permission and had to return in three minutes.

The student was responsible for obtaining both classroom and homework to do during in-house suspension. During this time, students were only allowed to read educational books, journals, magazines, or to write. Other activities had to be approved by the paraprofessional in charge and students must remain quietly seated. Any type of electronic device and sleeping were prohibited. A participant in this study commented:

> In-house suspension is the worst because if you are at home you stay there and you can do whatever you want. In school suspension you sit in one room for the whole day, for the whole school day!, and even if you don't do your work you can't put your head down to go to sleep or nothing. You can't talk. You can't listen to radio or nothing like that. If you don't bring work it is really boring . . . and it is cold in the room, really cold, especially in the winter.

A Typical Day in the Life of Orlando

Following morning homeroom announcements at 8:00 a.m., a day at South Central High School consisted of seven class periods. A typical day in the life of a student who

achieved at a high level involved attending six continuous classes, study halls, and maneuvering through the lively corridors of the high school with four minutes between class periods. Orlando, a junior at South Central High, began his day with an Honors Italian class, followed by Honors Algebra II, physical education or a third period study hall. Orlando consistently visited the LRC where he found the quiet he needed to study for his fourth period class, a challenging course entitled Urban Literature. From period four, he traveled to a computer class, followed by a Native Spanish class the next hour. A free hour took Orlando to the North Commons area where he enjoyed lunch and the camaraderie of his peers as they wolfed down a hot meal prepared by the lunchroom kitchen staff. Following his meal in the school cafeteria, Orlando had time remaining in the hour to visit with friends along the second floor corridor where faculty members and administrators supervised the social hour of the students. Carrying a prearranged corridor pass to guarantee admittance to his destinations, Orlando might also visit a faculty member to discuss Student Council business, return to the LRC to study, or stop by the guidance office to check in with his counselor. Following the lunch hour, Orlando had one class remaining in his day. He ended his academic day with a trip to the first floor where he joined his friends in the music department and participated in a small Woodwinds class. Not having been outdoors all day, Orlando escaped to the school grounds for a short breath of fresh air before returning inside the building for his after school extracurricular activities.

Miscellaneous Events

Every day at South Central High School was unique as different events occurred, and during every month, several interesting events took place. Table 3 presents selected monthly activities and events at this high school from a four month period during the second semester of the first year in which the study was conducted.

The End of a School Day

It was 1:50 p.m. Seven yellow school buses were lined up in the back parking lot of the high school. The sound of the bell from within the building blasted loudly across campus. The first person out of the building was a young Hispanic female dressed in a suede jacket with fringe, who stopped by a red sports car parked in the lot and chatted with the young man behind the wheel. Behind her was a group of male students of different ethnic groups walking together in a pack. All were wearing baseball caps turned backwards on their heads as they proceeded away from the school grounds. Several white-haired faculty members left behind them, carrying no briefcases, only plastic sacks with the remnants of lunch.

The student body quickly poured out of the building and filled the school buses parked there. Within ten minutes, the buses and cars pulled away from the student section of the parking lot. Several cars remained as teenagers waited for friends to arrive. Spanish music and Rap could be heard pouring out of the car radios.

Table 3

Typical Activities and Events During the Second Semester at South Central High School

Month	Activity and Events
February	African American History Month. Exciting and enlightening workshops, lectures, guest speakers, videos, and films. Valentine's Day. The senior class is sponsoring a flower and Valentine's photo sale in the main lobby. Science Fair Phone call to Moscow to take place today from 7:50 to 9:15 a.m. "Please excuse the following students for this class activity" can be read in the school daily bulletin which also announces news for students.
March	A drug and alcohol survey for 10th graders takes place. The minority teacher recruiting career fair is held at a nearby college. Club pictures' day encourages students to leave their ripped jeans at home. Malcolm X Contest. Essays, videos, oral presentations are requested. First prize: satin backed kinte cloth. "Marisol." Students' trip to enjoy a Centerfield Stage Company production. College Fair. College representatives are visiting the school to offer information about their schools. Deli day. Submarine grinders are made to order.
April	Bloodmobile. The school is sponsoring a blood drive to help the Red Cross. Secretaries' Week. Special activities are planned to honor these remarkable, overloaded staff members. Earth Week. For this occasion, the Constructive Dynamic class is selling a variety of trees. Trees regularly $30 to $70 are on sale for a mere $15.00. Public hearings on city/education budget are held in the school. Film fest. This activity is sponsored by the school French Club. A laserdisk program on "Teenage Sexuality" is available to students. M. A. T. Testing dates. Accreditation team visits.

(table continues)

Table 3 *(continued)*

Typical Activities and Events During the Second Semester at South Central High School

Month	Activity and Events
May	Suicide Prevention Week. Films and lectures are intended to help people recognize the warning signs Forums. Panel on race relations and women in leadership. Junior and Senior picnics and proms Heritage Assembly. Remember the '60s. Music, clothing, books, magazines, and photos are on display. "Peer Gynt" symphony concert. Complimentary tickets are offered to the students. South Central High School Concert Choir. The choir is performing with the Centerfield symphony orchestra. Annual student piano recital. National day of prayer. The Bible Study Group is sponsoring a student "get together" to worship the Lord. Lively music accompanies this activity.

Several teenagers congregated around a Ford Mustang. A very heavy Hispanic male hugged his girlfriend who kissed him on the lips as he proceeded to pick her up off the ground. She yelled in Spanish as he continued to spin the heavy-set young woman around his shoulders. Their friends did not stop him, but continued to smoke their cigarettes as they leaned against the car. The driver of the car stepped out of the rusty Mustang and expressed her frustration as she hollered across the yard, "When is she gonna' come outta there! I'll be here all f . . .' day!" The heavy young man stopped spinning his girlfriend and put her down. Eventually, another young Hispanic female arrived and all of the teenagers jumped into the cramped sports car and drove away with tires squealing and dark smoke pouring from the exhaust pipe.

The student parking lot at South Central High School looked deserted. It was 2:15 p.m. However, inside the school, another day began for some students. Within the walls of South Central High, dedicated groups of students remained until early evening hours. Football players reported to the gymnasium to lift weights, swimmers dove into the pool and began their daily practice, National Honor Society members met in a classroom to discuss their upcoming service project, and student council members met to discuss a new idea to stimulate an apathetic student body.

CHAPTER 5: Results of Case Studies

A Description of the Participants

This chapter is presented in four sections. The first two sections include descriptive case studies of the male and female students who achieved in school, and the remaining two sections include case studies of the male and female students who underachieved in school. Approximately two-thirds of the case studies presented are comprehensive and the other third are presented in an abbreviated format due to space limitations in this report. Family demographic information about each participant is included in Table 4.

The Male High Ability Achievers

Vaughn

Vaughn's appearance changed like the weather. In September, he wore his blonde hair parted in the middle and long on the sides. On his chin was the beginning of a light goatee. He wore an unbuttoned heavy flannel shirt over a plain white T-shirt, oversized baggy jeans and heavy maroon leather boots. Vaughn called this "his new grunge look." Later in the year, he wore designer athletic sweatshirts and arrived for interviews with his hair cropped very short with long sideburns. Several weeks passed and Vaughn surprised us with another change. He wore a mohawk hairstyle with the stripe of spiked hair down the center of his head dyed peroxide blonde. By mid-winter, his smooth oval shaped head was completely shaved! Throughout these changes, Vaughn wore wire rimmed glasses, a mischievous grin and a retainer over his sparkling white, perfect teeth. He was a polite, soft spoken young man who was known in his senior class as an athlete and a scholar. Friends described Vaughn as a sensitive guy who was well respected. He admitted that many of his peers took their personal problems to him, for he was known as a good listener and a true friend.

Vaughn's parents were divorced when he was a young child. He lived with his father after the divorce and he explained that the divorce had been friendly; his mother simply did not have the same life goals as his father. She was not college educated while his father had several degrees. Vaughn's father was a science teacher at South Central High School, a man who had always been busy pursuing advanced degrees and teaching in South Central's adult education program in the evenings. Vaughn had always been comfortable with the divorce. His mother lived in a nearby community and he saw her regularly. She worked as an office manager and owned her own home, having won half a million dollars in the State Lottery. Vaughn explained, "She'll never have to worry."

Table 4

Family and Parental Demographics

Student	Siblings	Parents' Marital Status	Parents' Occupation	Parents' Educational Level	Parents' Involvement in Student's Life
Male Achievers					
Vaughn	2 older	Divorced	M-Office Manager F-Science Teacher	M-High School F-Several Degrees	M-Sees regularly F-lives with
Rafael	6 younger	Married	M-Housewife F-unemployed	M-Some High School F-High School	M-Yes F-No
Lucio	1 younger 1 older	Divorced Step	M-State Employee F-Laborer	M-Secretarial F-High School	M-Yes F-No/Step-Yes
Orlando	4 younger 3 older	Married	M-Teacher's Assistant F-Guidance Counselor	M-High School F-Master's Degree	M-Yes F-Yes
Matteo	1 younger	Married	M-Travel Agent F-Unemployed	M-Associate's Degree F-Technical Training	M-Yes F-Yes
Wallace	1 younger	Married	M-Nurse's Aide F-Cab Driver	M-High School F-High School	M-Yes F-Yes
Rob	1 older	Married	M-Food Service Supervisor F-Machinist	M-Some High School F-Third Grade	M-Yes F-Yes
Alfred	2 stepsisters	Divorced	M-Nurse's Aide F-Electrician	M-No High School F-Trained in Cuba	Splits time with parents
Jesse	3 younger	Married	M-Lisc. Day Care Provider F-State Employee	M-Bachelor's Degree F-Master's Degree	M-Yes F-Yes
Female Achievers					
Nicki	1 sister	Divorced	M-Clerical Worker F-Mail Carrier	M-High School F-High School	M-Yes F-Minimal
Jana	2 younger 1 older	Divorced	M-Hair Dresser F-Unemployed	M-Elementary School F-Some High School	M-Yes F-No
Marisa	1 older	Married	M-House Wife F-Owner Family Business	M-High School F-High School	M-Yes F-Yes
Mary	1 younger	Married	M-Teacher F-Social Worker	M-Bachelor's Degree F-Master's Degree	M-Yes F-Yes
Rosa	2 younger	Married	M-Dietary Aide F-Unemployed	M-Did not graduate F-High School	M-Yes F-Yes

(table continues)

Table 4 *(continued)*

Family and Parental Demographics

Student	Siblings	Parents' Marital Status	Parents' Occupation	Parents' Educational Level	Parents' Involvement in Student's Life
Toni	3 younger 2 older	Divorced	M-Home Maker F-N/A*	M-High School F-N/A*	M-Yes F-No
Tania	1 younger 3 older (1 twin)	Divorced	M-Home Maker F-N/A*	M-High School F-N/A*	M-Yes F-No
Claire	1 younger	Divorced	M-Library Supervisor F-Truck Driver	M-High School F-High School	M-Yes F-No
Alexa	2 younger 1 older	Married	M-Clerical F-Engineer	M-Attended College F-College Degree	M-Yes F-Yes
Male Underachievers					
John	3 older	Married	M-Nurse's Aide F-Truck Driver	M-Comm. College F-High School	M-Yes F-Yes
Benton	stepbrother	Divorced	M-Clerical F-N/A*	M-Adult Education F-High School	M-Yes F-No/Step-Yes
Mitch	1 younger	Married	M-Produce Clerk F-Auto Mechanic	M-High School F-High School	M-Yes F-Yes
Chico	10 older	Married	M-Day Care Provider F-Unemployed	M-High School F-Eighth Grade	M-Yes F-Yes
Morgan	1 older	Married	M-Teacher F-Consultant for City	M-Bachelor's Degree F-Master's Degree	M-Yes F-Yes
Skip	1 older	Divorced	M-Unemployed F-Taxi Cab Driver	M-High School F-High School	M-Yes F-Yes
Martin	1 younger	Separated	M-Paraprofessional F-Unknown	M-Bachelor's Degree F-Eighth Grade	M-Yes F-No
Greg	5 older	Married	M-Hospital Technician F-Owner Const. Company	M-Some College F-Associate's Degree	M-Yes F-Yes
Kevin	1 younger	Divorced	M-Secretary F-Health Care Worker	M-High School+ F-High School+	M-Yes F-Yes

(table continues)

* Information not available; father not involved in participant's life.

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Table 4 *(continued)*

Family and Parental Demographics

Student	Siblings	Parents' Marital Status	Parents' Occupation	Parents' Educational Level	Parents' Involvement in Student's Life
Male Underachievers					
Leo	1 younger	Unmarried	M-Student F-N/A*	M-High School F-Some College	M-Yes F-No
Marwin	2 older	Married	M-Unemployed F-Unemployed	M-Some High School F-Some High School	M-Yes F-Yes
Milton	2 younger	Divorced	M-Housewife F-N/A*	M-N/A* F-N/A*	M-Yes F-No
Female Underachievers					
Mandy	2 younger	Divorced	M-Clerical Worker F-Unemployed	M-Some High School F-High School	M-Yes F-No
Sandra	1 younger 1 older	Married	M-House Wife F-Machine Operator	M-Fourth Grade F-High School	M-Yes F-Yes
Rosa Marie	2 older	Divorced	M-Home Care Nurse F-Pastor	M-Technical College F-N/A*	M-Yes F-No
Yvellise	2 older	Married	M-House Wife F-Owner Auto Store	M-High School F-Some High School	M-Yes F-Yes
Ivy	2 younger	Divorced	M-Student F-Unemployed	M-Attending High School F-N/A*	M-No, Lives with grandmother F-No

* Information not available; father not involved in participant's life.

Vaughn was the youngest child in his family and the only son. His older sisters were no longer living at home. One older sister, who was 25, was married and worked as a secretary in Arizona, and Vaughn's oldest sister, who was 27, was a fourth grade teacher in the Centerfield school system. Vaughn was very close to both of his sisters. He was looking forward to serving as an usher in his oldest sister's wedding. This sister was seen regularly at all of Vaughn's athletic meets, cheering on her little brother from the sidelines. Vaughn's father and he lived in a section of Centerfield known as Foster Heights, the most prestigious middle class neighborhood in the city. Vaughn explained that it was "a neighborhood of good families." With his father gone much of the time and his older sisters away in college, Vaughn learned to spend a great deal of time alone and commented that he had enjoyed learning how to entertain himself and become independent. While Vaughn was described by his teachers and peers as a sensitive young man, they described his father as rather macho, and Vaughn admitted that he and his father had a rather non-communicative relationship. Vaughn saw his father as a tough disciplinarian who held

conservative views, wouldn't allow his son to wear an earring, and wouldn't appreciate his recent excursions with friends to grunge music nightclubs in the Centerfield area.

When discussing plans for after high school, he listed the colleges he had applied to for a program in environmental studies. His sense of independence was reflected in his choice of schools. He applied to The University of Washington, The University of Oregon and The University of Vermont. His decision possibly to attend college on the west coast was troublesome for his mother. She worried about him being so far from home. Vaughn's father had simply asked, "How much was it going to cost me?" Vaughn was planning on a career working for an organization like *Greenpeace*. He explained, "I'd like to do something about oil spills. If I don't get accepted to colleges, maybe I'll join the Peace Corps. I've always thought I might like to do that."

Vaughn's elementary school and junior high years were trouble free. He was described by an elementary school teacher as a young boy with an "affable, cooperative, and considerate nature." Another teacher wrote "Vaughn had excellent mental acuity." He was involved in a gifted and talented program as early as third grade, participating in enrichment resource room activities. Achievement test scores in reading and math were 96th percentile and above throughout his early years. In seventh grade, when his elementary school decided to change to heterogeneous grouping, Vaughn's father decided to transfer him to another school in the south end of Centerfield so he could be in a self-contained gifted class through his junior high years. He achieved grades of A or B in that setting. He arrived at South Central and was placed totally in honors classes. During his junior and senior years, he was involved in two Advanced Placement courses in biology and epidemiology. Vaughn maintained straight As in his freshman year and held on to a B or B+ average throughout his sophomore, junior, and senior years. He was inducted into the National Honor Society in grade 10 and by his junior year, he was ranked 14th in a class of 330.

Vaughn's day at South Central began at 6:15 a.m. each day when he and a van load of swim team members were transported to the Doc Sullivan Field House for their morning laps. Coach Brogan had established a routine where he would pick up a number of the team members in his van and provide them the opportunity to gain some extra time in the school's swimming pool. Vaughn's relationship with his swim coach was very close for he was a person whom Vaughn truly admired. He swam for this coach for four years and was appreciative of the way he had created a family feeling among the South Central High swimmers. By Vaughn's senior year, his involvement on the well-respected team, provided him a strong reputation as a leader in his senior class. Vaughn spent all of his free time by the pool and also helped the high school's special education department with swimming lessons for handicapped students. Vaughn had been selected for this job by Coach Brogan.

Vaughn had achieved ten varsity letters in swimming, baseball, and cross country. A scholar and athlete, he wrote in his senior résumé that the personal traits he valued most in himself were his sensitive qualities—his understanding, his willingness to listen to people, and the trustworthiness his friends saw when they shared sensitive issues with Vaughn. In his résumé, he wrote that he did not dream of making fortunes for himself but hoped to achieve a happy life, be content with himself, and reach his personal goals.

Rafael

A circle of female faculty members sat in the teachers' lounge chatting. One was overheard saying, "I can't understand why the girls in this high school haven't discovered Rafael! What a wonderfully sensitive young man." Rafael knew he was sensitive and at times, it had been a problem. Rafael began his senior year having just gotten over a major heartbreak the year before. He had fallen in love with an older girl and had been unable to

focus on his studies for a portion of the school year. It was then that Rafael wrote his poetry in Spanish since the language allowed him to express his true feelings more clearly. He explained that poetry helped him to clear his thoughts. He didn't write "poetry about flowers and trees" but instead, he wrote when "he faced obstacles in life." Through the poetry and with the help of his guidance counselor who took a sincere interest in the young, sensitive gentleman, Rafael was back on track.

Rafael regularly reported to the high school library every day during fourth period. He often sat at a table alone and became totally absorbed in reading or writing his English compositions. He appeared dignified at the library table, his smooth dark complexion accentuated by a short conservative haircut and a well groomed mustache. He had acquired an athletic physique through neighborhood football and basketball games as well as training in Spanish folk dancing. He blushed when he explained that he enjoyed salsa. He dressed in black jeans, black leather loafers and brightly colored, flowered, short sleeved shirts. He claimed that too many high school teenagers judged people according to the status-oriented designer clothing they wore. He was a man of simple means and saw no need to have an elaborate wardrobe.

Rafael was the oldest child in a family of seven children. He lived with his three brothers and three sisters and parents in a small two-family duplex of cement brick in Centerfield's projects. He referred to feelings of "such desolation and despair" when he looked out at his neighborhood and realized that so many of the young people in that area were turned off by school and had given in to the culture of the streets. "They feel the system has failed them. They act so indifferent," he said in discouragement. "I feel so isolated here. I'm really alone." Rafael's father was unemployed and waiting to return the family to Puerto Rico once Rafael graduated from high school. The simple furniture in Rafael's home was sparse, and combined with the religious objects and statues of the Blessed Virgin, indicated that times had been difficult for this family who perhaps depended on their deep religious faith.

Rafael was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico and emigrated to Centerfield when he was eight years old. After a short return to the island for part of his second grade year, Rafael's family remained in the states. Rafael's parents spoke only Spanish, thus, he was placed in a self-contained bilingual program upon arrival in school. By sixth grade, Rafael was mainstreamed into a regular classroom. Teachers in elementary school were impressed with Rafael's commitment to his work. One teacher wrote, "Excellent student—Rafael had worked hard and was very competitive with others." His sixth grade teacher reported him to be "A 4.0 average student who works diligently and does the best he can at all times." By junior high school, his teachers noted, " Although Rafael was very quiet, he was tuned in academically, and had made great progress this year." The young man from a bilingual background achieved high scores of 93rd percentile in math and 80th through 90th percentiles in reading. By his freshman year, Rafael was ranked 7th in a class of 472, carrying a full load of academic level courses. The following years were more challenging since he remained enrolled in primarily honors level courses.

Rafael was recommended for a variety of enrichment programs for inner city high school students of high ability. He participated in a number of summer programs where he spent time studying at exclusive private academies or colleges throughout the state. One summer, he majored in French and the following summer, he took several creative writing classes. He enjoyed the dormitory experiences and was recognized by the resident counselors as a well-mannered, social leader among the students in these programs. Following these experiences in ivy-covered academic settings, Rafael admitted feeling depressed to return to the desolation he saw in his neighborhood back in Centerfield.

Rafael tried to make a difference. He reminisced about one male Hispanic teacher who had served as a role model to him in fifth grade and expressed how that teacher had made a difference for him. Rafael returned to his elementary school and offered his services as a volunteer tutor. He worked with the bilingual students because he thought they would feel that he "could relate to the problems they were facing." With experience working with young children, Rafael decided he wanted to major in early childhood education in college. Rafael will have the opportunity to pursue this dream as he was awarded a four-year scholarship of $100,000 to a prestigious state college in the Northwest.

Lucio

Lucio was a handsome young man who looked like a Latino version of a Hollywood teen idol. A short, muscular young man with broad shoulders, a creamy complexion, and perfect teeth that sparkled when his mesmerizing smile flashed, Lucio's reputation as a Casanova was well established among the students at South Central High. The manner in which the handsome young man entertained his female fans had been controversial since his arrival at the high school. Much to the chagrin of his coach, Lucio had gone down in South Central High's swim team history as the young man who stood at the end of the pool's diving board and mooned the high school's cheerleaders who were watching a swim team practice from a nearby balcony. Though the young man was disciplined for this behavior, he knew he had gained the adulation of younger swim team members and he shared the story of this typical prank with a hearty laugh.

Apparently, the handsome prankster had always been rather lively. His first grade teacher referred to him as a "good student, but noisy!" His second grade teacher commented that he was a "good student, but verbal." By grade three, the teacher appeared concerned when she wrote, "His behavior demands an adult's attention." Lucio's parents must have sighed relief when the fourth grade teacher wrote, "He had become a good leader, helper, and a wonderful person to work with." This lively young boy showed his high potential from the beginning. His standardized scores throughout elementary school ranged from the 94th to the 99th percentiles. His grades were superior, and by the time he reached the end of his freshman year, he was ranked 10th in a class of 490.

His coursework was strictly honors level and his grade point average fluctuated between a B and a B+. He requested two challenging math courses as a junior in order to take Advanced Placement Calculus at a nearby college next year as a senior. Lucio had been swimming for South Central since his freshman year and also served as an Executive Board member of the National Honor Society.

A visit to Lucio's home proved he came from a warm and loving Hispanic household. As Spanish music from a radio competed with the volume of cartoons on the television, Lucio's extended family members traveled through the family's modest apartment and stopped to pinch his cheeks or kiss him as he was seated during an interview at the family kitchen table. Lucio was Cuban-American and the youngest son of two from his mother's first marriage. Lucio's mother had remarried, and Lucio now enjoyed the companionship of a 3-year-old half-brother. Lucio's father had not been heard from in years and Lucio's older brother was living on his own. When Lucio was 13, he was legally adopted by his stepfather and indicated that was a turning point in his adolescence. He felt a tremendous amount of love and respect for this man who had made his mother and his new family very happy. Lucio's mother had emigrated from Cuba when she was 18 and had lived in Texas with her first husband for a number of years. She came to Centerfield and had been employed by the State Motor Vehicle Department over ten years. Lucio's stepfather was from El Salvador and was employed as a "handyman" or laborer at a private college around the corner from their home. Lucio's family lived in an immaculate two-story

apartment building, with Lucio's grandparents living downstairs from them. Lucio's parents had worked hard to keep their middle-class home looking as nice as all the other apartment buildings on their tree-lined street.

The warm family Lucio now enjoyed was a welcome change for the young man. He described his early teens as a troublesome period in his life and the support system he had found in his new family was making a difference. Though he was known throughout the corridors of South Central High School as a hell raiser or a Casanova, the handsome young man had a quiet, sensitive side that not too many people knew about. This was reflected in Lucio's art work, which he kept secret, the poetry he wrote and his relationships with older college females he described as "just friends" with whom he spent hours talking. He explained that according to the high school gossip, he had many girlfriends, but he claimed he ignored this talk and continued to enjoy quality relationships. He said:

> I find it easier to talk to girls than talking to the guys. With guys, you have to put on this facade. I feel more comfortable talking to girls. They express their emotions. I feel comfortable with that.

Orlando

Orlando's day began in prayer. As president of the Bible Study Club, Orlando conducted a session of prayer in Spanish with twelve or more students who stood holding hands in a circle, with their eyes closed, praying fervently. Orlando led this meeting each morning at 7:30 a.m. in the North Commons cafeteria. As Orlando led the group in devotion, a young woman played the flute in the center of the circle. Surrounding the group were hundreds of other South Central High students who socialized with each other before the start of the school day as Orlando's group appeared oblivious to the environment beyond their circle.

Orlando was described by all who knew him as a polite, young gentleman. The quiet, and soft spoken gentleman had run for junior class treasurer unopposed by any of his peers because, as one student explained, "Orlando was such a nice guy. Who would want to see him not win?" The sincerity he displayed in his religious beliefs and his commitment to his studies brought him the respect of his peers. Orlando was ranked first in his class and had been number one since arriving at South Central as a freshman.

Orlando was a small Puerto Rican young man who wore his short black hair combed neatly. He suffered from heavy acne yet this skin condition did not detract from his appearance since his warm, friendly smile allowed one to look beyond this teenage problem. He dressed in jeans, black Reeboks and colorful long-sleeved shirts completely buttoned to the neck. Over his shoulder was the ever-present black leather backpack filled with his load of heavy textbooks. He carried himself throughout the day with a real sense of dignity about him and would greet adults and friends with a sincere handshake.

Orlando was the fourth child in his family of eight children. He had three brothers and four sisters who ranged in age from 9 to 22. His parents had moved the family from Casa Rio Roi, Puerto Rico to Chicago, while his father pursued his Master's degree in counseling. Orlando and his siblings attended Catholic schools in Chicago and his memories of Chicago included the shock of cold winters, graffiti-covered buildings, and the emergence of street gangs. Orlando's parents wanted their children to continue appreciating their cultural heritage, so the family returned to Puerto Rico for a short while until Orlando's father was able to find employment as a public school teacher in Centerfield. Orlando arrived in the Centerfield public school system in third grade. His father was currently a high school guidance counselor, and Orlando's mother was employed as a teacher's

assistant in a daycare center. Orlando's mother had held only one other job prior to her present employment. She remained at home raising her eight children throughout most of Orlando's childhood. Orlando's family lives in a home on the outskirts of Centerfield, and together they enjoy a large backyard with lots of room for gardening and raising pets. Orlando described his family as close-knit and explained:

> We spend a lot of time together. We have dinner together every night. We summer together. We travel together to Chicago to visit relatives or wherever the Lord permits us to go. We are a unified family.

When Orlando came to the public schools in Centerfield, he spoke very little English. His parents insisted that he not be placed in a bilingual program. Instead, they requested that he be mainstreamed into the regular classroom environment to acquire the English language quickly. Orlando remembered struggling with his English in the beginning. He remembered his frustration but explained:

> I went mainstreamed and I was really trying my best. I think I even had Ds. The Lord was helping me out and little by little, I was able to adapt. By the time I was in 5th grade, I caught up and I advanced into the 6th grade reading level.

Orlando's teachers all through elementary school spoke highly of this serious young man. He was described as a "conscientious student with excellent study habits" by one teacher, while another noted on a report card that "Orlando's excellent work was a reflection of his fine attitude and effort." In fifth grade when Orlando was advancing to reading beyond grade level, he was recommended and became involved in the gifted and talented program at his school where he participated in enrichment experiences on a weekly basis. He earned all As on his fifth grade report card for the entire academic year. Sixth, seventh, and eighth grade report cards included no grade lower than a B+ and when Orlando arrived at South Central as a freshman, he mastered an A+ average in straight honors level courses. He had remained first in his class ever since.

Orlando's school day did not end at 2 o'clock. His extracurricular activities included as heavy a load as the honors level textbooks in his backpack. He was a gymnastics team competitor, school newspaper reporter, class officer, student council member, Bible Study Club president, Christian Youth Fellowship volunteer, and a tutor for other high school students at South Central High. Orlando's afternoons were action-packed and kept him in school until late afternoon. Following dinner with his family, homework kept him busy until about midnight. Orlando's high school portfolio included letters of recommendation for a variety of awards and involvement in special programs for high ability inner city high school students. His guidance counselor had often written "Orlando was highly respected by his peers and the South Central High School family." When asked to comment on this, Orlando blushed modestly and shared his personal motto, "Outer forces might be strong, but with inner peace, you can't go wrong!"

Matteo

Matteo talked incessantly and many people listened. As a politician with the gift of gab, he took his campaign on the road. He walked into every junior homeroom class at South Central High in September and spoke to the members of his class about his plans as Junior Class President to eradicate student apathy. When the administration suggested having the junior prom in the school gymnasium rather than in a hotel ballroom, Matteo went wild. His emotional plea to the students convinced them to vote for this energetic candidate. "A prom in the gym? No way! I run around in my shorts down there! I work

out and get dirty down there! I am not going to rent a tuxedo and go dancing where I have done that!"

Matteo's speech and campaign tactics worked. He defeated two well respected football players and a popular female for the position of class president and his family celebrated his victory. Throughout the year, with sheer determination and hard work, he managed to get his peers involved in class fund raising projects and the planning of a memorable prom. He enjoyed it when his friends referred to him as "Mr. President" and he decided in mid-December to run for re-election in his senior year. The enthusiastic class politician enjoyed the power.

Matteo was a high-energy young man who spoke emotionally, providing his audience with animated facial expressions, sincerity, and a wide toothy grin. He used analogies throughout his daily conversations and had the vocabulary of an MIT professor. He had a personal theory to explain how his mind operated, comparing his mind to a computer which provided him with separate files. One file controlled his responsibilities for the junior class presidency, another stored information for his leadership role in Junior Achievement, another file stored the academics and finally, one file controlled the heart, where Matteo organized his "romantic projects." An active young man who was constantly on the go, he was known by all faculty members as he was very comfortable chatting with adults.

Matteo came from a close-knit Italian family living in the south end of the city. Matteo and his family lived in a three-family apartment building owned by his Italian grandparents who lived on the first floor. Above Matteo's family on the third floor lived his Uncle Sal's family. His father's second brother, Sal, lived in a nearby neighborhood. In Matteo's father's family, when one brother moved, the remaining families followed. Matteo was the oldest son in a family of two children. His younger sister Maria was 13 and adored her older brother. Both Matteo's parents were born in the state and had graduated from high school. Matteo's mother had pursued training in the travel industry and was a certified travel agent. She was involved in coursework towards an associate degree in the travel-tourism field. Matteo's father had been a jack of all trades, having pursued a number of fields. He was currently working as an audit inspector for a manufacturing plant in West Centerfield and he faced troubled times. With budget cuts in the military, this industry was leaving the state, and Matteo's father was expecting to lose his position at the plant. Matteo explained that his dad had been very stressed about his expected layoff and the atmosphere at home had at times been tense. Matteo and his father had a close relationship and it bothered Matteo to see his father so worried. Together they busied themselves with money-making projects. Sitting at the family computer, they designed blueprints for furniture they dreamed of selling in their small business some day. Matteo's father was a creative gentleman and Matteo admired this trait in his Dad.

Matteo had been recognized for his creativity as a child. One elementary school teacher noted in his school records that Matteo was a student with a real strong curiosity who constantly brought "interesting articles" to share with the class. His achievement test results all through elementary school reflected a keen mind—consistent 98th and 99th percentiles in several subject areas. Matteo's curiosity and sharp intellect were the reason he was recommended for the self-contained gifted and talented class in third grade. Following an unsuccessful experience in that setting, Matteo's fifth grade teacher recommended that he be scheduled into a less accelerated program, for he was having difficulty with the faster pace in the gifted class. Matteo was upset at the time with the school's decision. He connected with a sympathetic teacher who helped him with his organizational skills and he vowed that he would "prove them wrong." He earned grades of A and B from that time on

and left his junior high school with three academic awards which he proudly received in an assembly, having been vindicated on the final day of school.

During his freshman year at South Central High School, he marched into his guidance counselor's office and requested to be placed in honors classes again. His request was granted and Matteo had remained there ever since. He maintained a B or B+ average. Matteo was one of the most active students at South Central High. Along with playing trombone for the school band, playing tennis, and running cross country, he was elected to the National Honor Society, the Student Council, and served on a number of executive boards which governed statewide student engineering organizations. Matteo was involved in a wide variety of specialized summer programs and enrichment opportunities designed to raise the aspirations of high ability youngsters from inner city high schools. Following several summers studying engineering, Matteo decided to pursue a college degree in civil engineering and environmental studies. He decided the most practical way to accomplish this goal was through the U.S. Air Force Academy. The energetic young politician and student leader did not waste time. He began the application process and explained he was ready to meet the challenge of being selected to such an exclusive institution.

Wallace

Wallace kept the sports commentators busy announcing his name. In any football game featuring South Central High School, Wallace, who was 6'1" and weighed 270 pounds, was the offensive and defensive tackle who could be depended on to produce in any crucial play. The public address system boomed with his name from kickoff to the final whistle. Because of his dependability and talent on the field, the South Central High fans looked upon Wallace as a local hero and the Centerfield area sports commentators had only praise for the young, African American athlete. Wallace, however, was a modest young man who knew his talents were combined with much hard work to achieve this athletic success, and he explained his realistic outlook came from his upbringing at home.

> You come home feeling really proud. You're a champion! And Mom's reaction was 'Okay, champion, it's your turn to do the dishes and don't forget to clean your room! You know, you're no better than anyone else.' My parents were proud—tremendously! They congratulate me, but after it's over, it's 'Go clean your room!'

Wallace had excelled in varsity football since his freshman year. During the winter months, he ran indoor track which he explained, "was simply the coach's breeding for football season." He won a gold medal for his shot-put throw in the State Inter-Scholastic Athletic Conference, breaking statewide records. Several colleges had their scouts attending South Central's games and investigating the promising young star. Wallace's mail had also included several letters from colleges inviting Wallace to visit their campus and chat with their coaching staffs. This attention was exciting, yet Wallace described how he dealt with the hype when he said, "I block it out. I go out there and concentrate, knowing what I have to do and I work hard."

Wallace and his younger brother, Derrick, a sophomore at South Central High School, lived with their parents in a modest apartment building in the south end of Centerfield. His father drove a taxi for the Yellow Cab Company and his mother was a nurse's aide at a convalescent home in their neighborhood. Neither parent had a college education but they instilled this dream in both their sons. Wallace's parents had plans for their boys and they wanted to be sure they "followed the right path." They insisted that athletics was not the only ticket and instilled the value of academics. This may have been a struggle with Wallace in the beginning because his elementary school years were not without problems.

Wallace's teachers were concerned about him all through elementary school. His fourth grade teacher commented in his school records, "Wallace gets involved with students and doesn't control his behavior!" His fifth grade teacher noted, "Wallace works hard when positive behavior is present. When he is upset, his work suffers. He needs to control his temper." His sixth grade teacher noted, "Wallace's attitude socially and academically is inconsistent. He requires much supervision because he is far too interested in his neighbors." Teachers knew that Wallace had the ability. Achievement tests reflected this, Wallace scored in the 88th percentile in reading and math and 86th percentile in language. In fifth grade, Wallace was recommended for the gifted and talented program, but chose not to join the self-contained G/T class, because he did not want to leave his friends. In seventh grade, teachers continued to recognize the high potential in the young man and recommended him for a two-year enrichment program, which provided high potential students from inner-city environments with field trips and specialized training with professional architects. Through this exposure to creative individuals, Wallace gained a great deal of confidence and pointed out that many skills he used in his current coursework had been developed through this program.

The high potential and strong ability were recognized again in high school when Wallace was chosen for the Upward Bound Program. He participated in Upward Bound's six-week summer program at a private college in Centerfield and he continued to benefit from the support systems provided by the program throughout the scholastic year. Wallace the athlete was also Wallace the newspaper columnist, who contributed articles regularly to the *Centerfield Gazette's* "Student Page," and Wallace the scientist, who won a second place prize with two partners in the city-wide Science Fair competition. Wallace's program at South Central was a combination of honors and academic classes and he was achieving a B average.

Wallace had earned the respect of his peers as the entire student body recognized that this young man was someone they'd be reading about after he left South Central High School. This soft-spoken, articulate young gentleman who was popular with his peers and served them as their Student Council President, initially had aspirations of attending Clemson University, playing football, and eventually becoming a public relations expert. These aspirations changed, however as Wallace began to consider the impact of athletics on many college athletes. He decided instead to accept a scholarship to a small private liberal arts college with an excellent academic reputation.

Rob

Rob was the all-American teenager. A short, muscular young man with a warm, friendly smile, he wore his brown hair short and, much to the chagrin of his parents, Rob was determined to keep his soft brown mustache. Rob wore t-shirts and sweatshirts proclaiming his loyalty to the state university's basketball team, and constantly carried a heavy backpack of textbooks over his right shoulder. A well-mannered young man, Rob spoke in a soft, polite tone of voice and was always very careful not to offend people by the comments he made concerning his school and his peers at South Central High.

Rob was the only son in a very close-knit Italian family. He and his older sister were brought up to respect their elders and value their Italian heritage. Both Rob's parents had emigrated from Italy and provided their children with a bilingual home filled with, in their words, family traditions and Roman Catholic values. Rob appeared to be the epitome of wholesomeness; he had been a Boy Scout, handled a daily paper route as a young teenager, and continued to serve as an altar boy in his nearby parish church. Rob expressed his love of family openly and explained that on weekends, when he was not studying, working at a local ice arena or practicing with his hockey team, he would take a city bus

across Centerfield and visit an elderly, bedridden aunt. Once a month Rob would travel by bus to the state university to visit his older sister in her campus dormitory. He had a close relationship with his sister, and although his own achievements in high school were far more notable, he spoke of his sister's academic accomplishments with pride.

Rob was identified for a gifted and talented program in third grade and he enjoyed the opportunities available to him in his elementary school's enrichment program. Rob's elementary and junior high school report cards were filled with glowing teacher comments such as "Rob is a true delight. He has been a model student. He is a well adjusted, pleasant young man." and "Rob is a well-behaved, industrious student with excellent work habits. He works diligently with a minimum of direction. With these excellent qualities, he will continue to achieve academic success."

With achievement scores consistently ranking in the high 90th percentiles, Rob was on the high honor roll all through high school. In his freshman year, he was ranked second in his class of 490 students and by his junior year he had held on to fourth place in a class of 360. He good-naturedly explained this drop in class rank by pointing out the challenges afforded him in a demanding Honors Physics class. Although Rob found a real challenge in his physics course, he readily admitted that math and science were his passion. He described himself as someone who enjoyed learning "concrete, black and white subjects" and he looked forward to a career in engineering.

Alfred

Alfred was 5' 8" tall and weighed about 140 pounds. He was of Jamaican heritage, and his mother and father arrived in America in the late 1970s. Alfred was born in the United States. Alfred's school records indicated that he had some psychological problems and he was referred by his eighth grade teacher for a psychiatric consultation for depression. Neither Alfred nor his parents were supportive of the referral and the family attended only one session. Alfred insisted that he was not depressed but only very shy. This shyness affected his social relationships and he admitted that he had difficulty talking to people and that he only had two friends but had "several acquaintances." Alfred could only name two people whom he considered friends at school—one male and one female whom he had known since seventh grade. He had more friends in the another geographic area of the city where his father lived and where he had lived until recently. He saw these "friends" on weekends. Alfred did not have a girlfriend, but he admitted he liked the female friend mentioned earlier, who was also Jamaican but had a boyfriend. Alfred believed that having a girlfriend was the thing to do but that there was no pressure to have this type of relationship. He wanted to have a steady relationship, but said "it would be difficult for me to approach a girl because I am so shy." Alfred acknowledged that his shyness was a real problem for him. It caused him embarrassment and was cited as the reason for his lack of friends. Alfred said it was difficult for him to walk down the street. "I am so self-conscious. I don't talk much and some of the other students think I am stuck-up. Sometimes someone will speak to me or ask me a question and I open my mouth but nothing comes out." Alfred believed that people don't understand him. "They don't listen. They think I am depressed but I am only shy. I told them I am not depressed. When I get home, I am fine. In school, I am miserable."

Alfred kept his hair shaved very close to his head. The most noticeable features about his appearance were his thick glasses and the way that he kept his head down a great deal of the time, even when walking along the corridor with other students or when engaged in conversation. He dressed very conventionally for his peer group—baggy jeans and tee or sweat shirts. He liked to dress "weird" but this was not tolerated by either his father or mother. He said he would like to dress "hoodriat" which he said was dressing with the

intent to intimidate. "When you dress hoodriat and go on the street, ladies will clutch their purses." Alfred said that his male friends dressed in this manner.

Alfred's mother and father were divorced. His father had remarried and Alfred had two stepsisters. Alfred lived with his father until recently when he moved in with his mother. He spent the school week with his mother and the weekend with his father and stepsisters. Only the clothes needed for school were kept at his mother's. The move to his mother's apartment was prompted by disagreements with his father over his choice of rap music and the fact that his father "hassled" him about cleaning his room. Alfred got along well with his mother and appeared satisfied with the arrangement.

Both of Alfred's parents were supportive of his education and tried to instill in him the need for a good education. Alfred's mother was a nurse's aide but she did not have a high school education. Alfred believed that she was "smart" but that she didn't have the family support that would have permitted her to get a good education. Alfred's father was 40 years old and an electrician by trade, receiving his training in Cuba. His talents were recognized in his native country and he was sent to Cuba to learn his trade, returning to Jamaica after his training. Alfred believed that his father was quite bright. The only language spoken by the family was English, although Alfred wanted to learn Spanish.

Alfred attended four schools in this city before enrolling at South Central. He began receiving service by the gifted program in fifth grade and continued going through middle school. In junior high school, enrichment for Alfred consisted of higher level reading and work on the computers. School work in the elementary years and junior high school years was generally easy for Alfred. In his first year in high school, however, Alfred was having some problems with English and mathematics. His problems in English stemmed from the fact that he did not always do his homework assignments.

Alfred had written some poetry on his own, but did not consider himself to be successful. He had also composed some rap, but only in his own home and not for an audience. His subject preference was art and he liked to do pencil sketches. When asked if he had a sample, he readily produced pieces from his backpack. He would like to pursue commercial or graphic arts after finishing school. Unfortunately, some of his drawings depicted violence which may contradict his belief that he is not depressed, only shy. Alfred was interested in attending college and since his interest was in art, he wanted to go to New York. The guidance counselor suggested an art college in Kansas City, but Alfred was not enthusiastic about that idea as he preferred to stay in a "big city." Alfred believed that he would probably study commercial art and advertising, but that was not his first choice. He preferred writing comic books and illustrating them, "something I can create on my own."

Alfred's fantasy was to become a rapper, although he realized that he could never perform on stage because of his shyness. He preferred to work in the background, writing and performing in a studio. Alfred also believed that he would have a tough time becoming a rapper coming from Centerfield, as L.A. would be a more likely place for a rapper to begin a career. He sarcastically called Centerfield a suburb, when compared to the big cities like L.A. and New York. "You could never make it from the suburbs. Rappers hate people from the suburbs." Alfred said that his interest in rap first developed in seventh grade. He continued to work on it and he felt that he was pretty proficient in writing rap.

Alfred believed that violence and drugs were the main environmental issues that interfered with his education, indicating that he knew drug pushers and that one had recently left school. However, he stated that there was no pressure to take drugs. "It's a personal decision but kids take drugs for many reasons. They just need to belong." Alfred said he knew individuals who were members of gangs, although gang members were not

distinguished by clothing or other identifying items. Alfred said he felt no pressure in his school to join a gang, and he believed the main reason for joining a gang was for protection.

Jesse

Jesse, a bi-racial 14 year-old sophomore, made the transition into high school without many problems. He had an engaging smile as he explained he had recently received his first D in his school career in Freshman Biology. Jesse was born in Germany on a military base where his father was stationed. His father, who was African American, left the armed forces and currently works for the state. His mother, who was White, was a licensed daycare provider. His parents both have their Bachelor's degrees, and his father completed a Master's degree. Jesse had three younger siblings with whom he seemed to have a healthy relationship. He affectionately called his brother "knuckle head" and he was also close with his two younger sisters, one of whom was almost completely deaf. Not only could Jesse communicate with this sister, but he considered himself bilingual in both English and Sign Language.

Jesse consistently did well in school. He had achieved straight As in several grades and missed only one day of school since third grade. Jesse had positive interactions with his teachers, receiving several awards in both elementary and middle school. On his report cards, teachers commented that he was very creative and was a pleasure to have in class. One of Jesse's mentors was his fifth grade teacher, Mr. Owens, who consistently urged him to do better on his projects. However, one teacher reported that he needed more self control.

Social interaction was one of Jesse's strong points. He had several friends and had no contact with gangs. The beginning of one of his closest friendships resulted from an incident that occurred at a nearby historical site. "Bad kids" decided to steal items from the gift shop, but nobody was willing to tell, except Jack. Jesse, who watched Jack report the theft, was in awe of this action and respected Jack a great deal.

Even though Jesse initially indicated that he did not belong to any extracurricular activities, he had several outside interests. He was in the Boy Scout's final stage of leadership as he was working on his Eagle badge. He also played the drums and was in a band. He preferred baseball to football and basketball and played in several Little Leagues. He attended church on Sundays and was preparing for his first communion. He enjoyed babysitting and helping out the members of the church community.

The Female High Ability Achievers

Nicki

Nicki was a small, slight girl with a shy smile and a reserved manner. She had light brown hair and a light complexion, and was the oldest of two sisters who lived with their mother. Their father, who was an alcoholic, was divorced from her mother when Nicki was seven and lived about an hour away. Neither parent attended college, and her father did not graduate from high school until after a stint in the navy. Her mother was a clerical worker for an insurance company and her father was a mail carrier. Nicki was not close to her mother at all and, in fact, had some anger toward her. She perceived that her mother expected perfection of her, and that a different set of expectations existed for her sister who was three years younger than she and was failing one class in the high school Nicki attended. Nicki, her mother, and sister lived in an apartment on the third floor of an older house in a neighborhood of two- and three-family houses in the city. A family of several

children lived in the apartment below her and her descriptions of her responsibilities in babysitting for the children who lived there resulted in a rare smile during an initial interview.

During her junior year, Nicki was ranked second in a class of 350 students. She was involved in the Honor Society, softball, swim team, track, and had taken years of dance. She also was involved in community services, was a lifeguard, participated in food drives and in the beautification of her high school. Nicki took all honors classes during her last two years of high school and her senior classes were Honors Spanish, Honors English, Honors History, Honors Pre-Calculus, Accounting, and Graphic Arts. She remembered classroom teachers from her elementary school and in particular, her freshman English teacher who had such an impact on her life that Nicki decided to become a teacher. Nicki participated in the elementary gifted program during fifth and sixth grade and remembered many of the activities in the program including the writing activities. She was also enrolled in a summer program at a private school in which she took advanced math and science classes. She won first prize in a statewide essay contest sponsored by a large insurance company for an essay she wrote about her father's battle with alcoholism. An excerpt from the essay for which she received a $10,000 scholarship follows:

> We entered the house like one might enter an unknown country, with silence and apprehension. The stranger isn't there. Upstairs, my mother set foot in my room and stood gaping at my bed. A look of ire and vexation was plastered on her face. That's when I noticed it, too. Carved on the wooden head post of my bed were the words "I love you." The dark surface of the wood was scratched so it looked as if the words were a different color. I kept staring at this message from the stranger. While my mother was distressed, I was glad. Some light spewed into my dark head. One empty question was answered.

Nicki applied to college at the [state university], Boston College, Connecticut College, and Columbia and was accepted by all of them. She received scholarships from most of the colleges and decided to attend Boston College. She explained that her mother and father wanted her to go to the [state university] because it was slightly less expensive, but she also indicated that her parents did not understand that with the scholarship package she had received, it would actually be cheaper for her to attend Boston College.

Most of Nicki's friends were Hispanic, with the exception of one other girl who was a high achieving student as well and who will also attend Boston College. Nicki believed that there was some prejudice against Puerto Ricans in the school and community and was very committed to the population of her city and her high school. She wanted to be a teacher and planned to work in a setting in an urban area in her future.

Nicki was determined to succeed, although she worried about whether she could do the hard work that would be required of her at college and knew that she had some issues that she must address in her life such as her relationship with her father and her distant relationship with her mother. She looked forward to going away to college and starting a new life.

Marisa

Marisa was a striking young woman who looked as if she could appear on the cover of any teenage magazine. She was slender, tall, and had long blonde hair that was teased on top. In the early stages of this study, she wore a great deal of makeup and jewelry around her neck, wrists, and on almost every one of her fingers was a gold ring. She was very energetic, spoke very quickly, and seemed to have a difficult time sitting still. She was

ranked third in her class of 360 during her junior year. Marisa played volleyball and softball. She was on the yearbook committee, a member of the National Honor Society, the Russian club, and various other activities. She carried a demanding course load, and was a hard worker. This hard work was reflected not only in her homework, but in her after school job as a clerical worker in a lawyer's office.

She had been identified and placed in the gifted program in elementary school and indicated that she had loved the program. She recalled the research projects in which she had been involved and discussed them individually. Marisa's parents were very strict with her. During her junior year, she had rebelled on several occasions because of the rules they enforced. Her mother was a housewife and her father owned his own small family business. Her parents were immigrants from Italy and neither had attended college. She had an older sister who had also done well in school and who was currently a junior at the state university. Marisa's parents had forced her to leave South Central High School during her freshman year to attend a small private high school instead. During her freshman year at that high school, Marisa was second in her class and was an outstanding student. She never got over having to leave her "own" high school" and begged and pleaded to be allowed to return. Promising to keep her grades up, Marisa prayed that the private parochial school she attended would close as had been rumored. Her wish came true and she returned to the public high school where she excelled as a student and was consistently active in numerous activities. During her junior year, Marisa had a boyfriend who had dropped out of high school. She was extremely social and talked to her boyfriend and several of her girlfriends every night on the phone.

Marisa acknowledged the role of her honors teachers and her guidance counselor, whom she indicated was like a father to her. She indicated that during her last two years in her high school her honors classes had changed. The classes had been opened up to enable anyone with an interest to take the classes. This had slowed the classes down a great deal. Marisa explained:

> We spent a month and a half going over molar volume because some people didn't understand it. The majority of people who were in my honors class before knew the stuff or learned it right away, but the other kids didn't so we had to wait for them.

Outside of her honors classes, Marisa liked working with the students who needed extra help. She was involved in the tutoring program at her school and worked each day with students who needed extra help. In her honors classes, her teachers encouraged her on a regular basis and were an instrumental part of her success. She attended special summer programs and became involved in a number of school activities that enabled her to interact with students from other high schools.

During the summer before her senior year, Marisa attended a summer program in psychology at an Ivy League university. She seemed to change in a number of ways. During her senior year, her appearance was quite different; she wore less makeup and jewelry, and indicated that she was less concerned about her clothing and appearance. She was much more interested in her studies, and had broken up with her boyfriend. She was going to the former Soviet Union on a trip with the Russian Club and was excited about the opportunities for learning. Her interests had expanded, and she was committed to going to a good college. She was accepted at several colleges and decided to attend a very selective small liberal arts college in her home state.

Mary

Mary, a senior who had been mentioned by almost all of the other high achieving students in this study as someone they admired and respected, was outgoing, honest, and direct. She spoke quickly and with great confidence and was able to communicate her ideas well and was impressive in many regards. A tall, attractive young woman with reddish hair and a light complexion, Mary had been recommended by numerous people for the study and it became clear after a preliminary review of her file that Mary was an academic superstar. She was an outstanding student in all respects. She was ranked first in her class, was taking all of the most advanced classes, had won numerous awards, and was elected President of the National Honor Society. Her mother was a teacher; her father was a social worker who had a Master's degree. Mary had one younger brother who attended the same high school as a freshman. Her report card indicated that her teachers have consistently considered her to be a delightful student. She always excelled in school and was considered a joy by most of her students. Comments such as "my joy," "a delight" were consistently written on her report card by her teachers.

Mary was involved in many activities involving sports and extracurricular clubs. She was in the swim club, as were so many of the high achieving students in this study, and she was also involved in softball. She was involved in a writing program, peer counseling, and numerous activities as a part of the service program of the National Honor Society. She did not date, but had many close friends. During her first interview for this study, she indicated that she had a female friend who had been a high achiever, but was not progressing in her search for an appropriate college to attend. Mary was also afraid that her friend was beginning to enter a period of underachievement and that her grades might fall, hurting her chances for a scholarship.

Mary was committed to urban education and continued to be positive about her high school. During her junior year, the high school changed policies about honors classes, opening up these classes to all students who might have an interest in taking them. Because of that policy, Mary and other students in this study indicated that the degree of challenge that existed in her honors classes had changed from last semester to this semester. She believed that less work was required of her and that she did not experience the same level of discussion and challenge in the classes that she had previously encountered in honors classes. Mary had decided to attend a religious, urban college with an outstanding reputation. She received an acceptance letter for early decision in the late fall of her senior year and remained committed to attending this college. She planned to major in social work, or counseling and indicated that she would enter a helping profession.

Jana

Jana was small and very quiet. She had long thick hair and dark eyes, and was a little heavy set. She smiled shyly and answered all questions in a brief, but sincere way. Jana was Puerto Rican and came to the city in which she still lives when she was three. She had one older brother and two younger sisters. Each of her siblings had different fathers. Her mother had been married twice but was currently single and she had not been married to the two men who were the fathers of Jana's younger sisters. Jana said that her mother was a very hardworking hairdresser who had only completed elementary school. Finances were very hard for her family and she said that she tried very hard not to ask her mother for money: "I know how it was for her, there just isn't very much money so I try not to ask her for any." She babysat often for her two younger sisters so that her mother could work longer hours. She lived with her mother and sisters in a small apartment in a complex near the high school.

Jana had achieved high grades throughout her years in school and was involved in many activities, including French Club, Yearbook, and the National Honor Society. She was taking all honors and Advanced Placement classes in her senior year and had a guidance counselor who stayed very involved with her education. She never dated, and had little help or support from her mother. She saw her father only occasionally, perhaps one or two times a month. She believes her continued achievement was related to seeing so many students at her high school have problems so consistently: "I think it's looking at everybody else, seeing how they're doing, and how all the girls were getting pregnant, and all the guys were turning to gangs and everything. I didn't want to be like that."

Jana worked on her homework for three or four hours every night. She was not athletic, but she was the manager of two athletic clubs at her high school. However, due to recent shootings, her mother had insisted that she curtail her after school activities for safety reasons. The gangs often had fights in the neighborhood in which she had to walk to get home from high school.

Jana had decided to attend the large state university that was close to her school. She had been recruited to the university by being asked to attend a special day that focused on minority students who had done well in high school. She looked forward to being on her own and was interested in pursuing a career in medicine. She was unsure if she would be able to make it as a doctor, but that was her dream.

Rosa

Rosa was an energetic, attractive young woman who spoke quickly and had a difficult time sitting still. She was a study in constant motion and it was immediately clear that she had a purpose in life. She was the oldest of two daughters and a son born to a mother who was a dietary aide and a father who worked in a factory, but was unemployed during most of the data gathering period of this study. Her mother, who was born in Puerto Rico, did not graduate from high school. Her father, who was Peruvian, completed high school and took a few college courses. Rosa was influenced by the recent illness of her younger sister who was recovering from cancer. This experience caused Rosa to decide to be a doctor and strengthened her resolve to do well in school.

Her work load at her high school was very heavy as she took all advanced courses and was very active in school. She was currently sixth in her class and had excelled in both academic and extracurricular activities since she entered school as a young girl. Comments made by teachers such as "My best student" and "highly motivated" and "best student in the school" can be found throughout her entire academic record beginning in kindergarten. During her senior year, Rosa received all As in Honors French 4, Honors Pre-Calculus, Honors Anthropology, Honors Composition, and Advanced Placement Biology. She was the editor of the yearbook, the captain of the soccer team, as well as a member of the National Honor Society, and the French and Russian Clubs. The Russian Club took a trip to Moscow and St. Petersburg for three weeks in the spring of her senior year. She also worked approximately 15 hours a week in the kitchen at the same health care facility in which her mother worked. She applied to Yale, Boston College, Wesleyan, and Brown during her senior year and will attend Brown on a full scholarship.

Rosa loved art and credited her mother's artistic ability as being the reason for her own talent in art. Rosa indicated that her parents did not pressure her to get top grades or to participate in all of the activities in which she took part. Rather, her parents encouraged her to do her best in all of her endeavors. She experienced various types of prejudice in the community and occasionally in academic experiences. She believed she had experienced prejudice because she was both smart and Puerto Rican. "I know that people will

occasionally look at me and say, when they find out that I'm smart, 'How can that be? She's Puerto Rican.'" This happened to her outside of Centerfield in the summer programs in which she participated for high achieving students which were held at some of the most prestigious private schools in the state.

She often spent five hours a night on homework and described herself as a hard worker. She participated in an elementary school gifted and talented program and many special programs within the state. She acknowledged the help and encouragement of some of her elementary and high school teachers and also indicated that she sometimes hid from her high school guidance counselor who was looking for her to fill out something for a special program, award, or scholarship. She also said that her guidance counselor, who was of Puerto Rican descent, would occasionally see her in the hallway with a male friend and "go ballistic" because he was so afraid that she was involved with a boy. Rosa, however, did not date at all until her junior year and then she chose a boyfriend who was away at college, explaining that for a talented Puerto Rican woman to date would mean she would have to put her hopes and dreams on hold and pay attention to the male. "I just want to do my thing first, boys were another thing, and my thing comes first." She smiled after making that comment and said, "Me first, that could be the name of a club for girls who want to achieve, couldn't it?"

Her parents did not socialize a great deal with other Hispanic families or relatives in the Centerfield community because of their perception of pressure to conform to values that they did not adhere to in their home. Rosa had friends of all backgrounds including one Puerto Rican girl who had been her best friend for many years and who provided support and a constant source of encouragement. This was a reciprocal relationship as Rosa continued to encourage her friend. Rosa believed that the honors and Advanced Placement classes that she took in her high school were an instrumental part of her success in school and also credited her friends and the peer group that attended classes together. In fact, the peer group of achievers in which Rosa was involved stayed together in their honors classes and many of their extracurricular activities including clubs, summer programs, and sports.

Toni

Toni wore a long, blue, column dress with short sleeves and black, woven, open-toed clogs at her initial interview. The dress flattered her tall, slender figure, and complemented her light, black complexion. She wore no jewelry except a gold hair clip that held up part of her shoulder-length, black hair and she did not wear any make-up.

Toni lived in a duplex located in the inner-city projects. She worked part-time in a small, quiet public library in a neighborhood not far from where she lived. She often walked to and from work in the afternoons when she finished classes. The houses along the street appeared similar to one another, some were brick, and some were beige like Toni's with small front yards. Some were kept up, and others were covered with graffiti.

Toni had two elder brothers, who did not live at home. She lived with her mother, Frances, twin sisters, and younger brother. She knew her father, but saw him "once in a blue moon," and did not hesitate to say she was not close to him at all. She described her relationship with her family as close, that they all "help each other." Besides her mother, Toni talked most frequently about her sister Tania. Although she doesn't want her to know it, Toni admired her younger sister's activity and success in school. Toni spoke highly of her mother, saying that she was the most influential person in her life. She explained how her mother, originally from the South, dropped out of eighth grade to help her own father who was very sick. Later, at the age of sixteen, she moved to New England, away from her entire family. Toni did not know any of her Southern relatives outside of what her mother

had told her. As a sophomore in high school, Toni said she and her younger sisters "persuaded" their mother to get her high school general equivalency diploma. With their help, her mother studied what her daughters studied in school, and eventually received her diploma. She was currently a homemaker, raising five children. Her mother's influence came not from her school achievement, but from Toni's admiration of her mother's "courage and will." It was important to Toni to make her mother proud of her, this was "what's pushed her to do well. Toni doesn't want to let her mother down, and it was her "dream" to get her mother out of the projects someday.

School had been a priority in Toni's life ever since she decided to attend college. According to her past performance from grade school all the way through junior high, Toni made "excellent progress," and was part of a gifted and talented program since first grade. Bluntly though, she admitted that the only way that she can go to college, was to have good grades because her family was not made of money. She described ninth grade as the most difficult year for her in the way of grades, school, and people; but she said she learned to cope with changes, put schoolwork first, and manage her time well. Toni seemed to have accomplished them as she graduated from high school with high honors, a Presidential Award, a membership in the National Honor Society, and the Spanish and U.S. History awards. She also received a full four-year scholarship to a small, prestigious college where she planned to study business in preparation to pursue a Master's degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management.

When discussing her future, Toni frequently mentioned that her main goal was to get her mother out of the projects. She believed she would make a lot of money "owning or managing a hotel and restaurant" and eventually creating a tourism business out of it. She did not hesitate, saying, "I have confidence in myself. I believe that I can do it. I'll have the house that I want, the job I want, if I'm married the kids that I want . . . and helping my mother out, too, getting her away from the projects." Toni maintained a part-time job at the local library four times a week during the school year to pay for all her own clothes, her contact lenses, and Christmas presents for her family, indicating her strong work ethic preparing her for her future.

Her values and her beliefs about the way she should live her life stemmed predominantly from her religion. As a Pentecostal Apostolic, or "church girl," as Toni put it, she believed she had a responsibility to lead a good life in which people get along with one another. She described her religion as being strict, because there were rules such as: women cannot wear pants or jewelry, and church members cannot go to the movies or parties. Toni regarded church as a strength in her life though because it guided her to make the right choices, it "kept her away from a lot of things." She attended church regularly—Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays—and participated in the teen choir. Although some of her friends regarded her church as too strict, Toni had no difficulty in expressing to them her feeling that she enjoyed going to church.

Toni did not regard herself as the typical high school teenager; instead she described herself, not only as a "church girl," but also as a "picky person" who was very "moody." It was important to her to get things done the right way and to be respected. When it came to friends, who were mostly males, Toni liked to have them over to her house for awhile, but she said she generally grew tired of their company after a short time. She often liked to spend time alone in her own room writing poetry. She did not date often, but had a boy friend, Heath, whom she said she had known since she was very young. In comparison with other females her age, Toni did not worry about impressing people and did not have sex. As part of her religious and personal value systems, Toni made it clear that if she was not married in the future, she would still be a virgin. Overall, Toni had a high sense of self-worth with a strong set of principles and was not pressured or influenced by her peers.

Alexa

Alexa was a tall, attractive 17 year-old female student who was very poised and quiet. She was hesitant in early interviews and it took several visits before she opened up and was able to speak confidentially. Because Alexa was bilingual, the interviews were conducted in English and Spanish by two of the researchers involved in this study. Alexa indicated that although she was Puerto Rican, most people believed she was African American because of her dark skin. Alexa was the second of four daughters born to parents who were still married. Alexa's father graduated from college in Puerto Rico and was an engineer. Her mother attended college and was working in a clerical position at an elementary school. Alexa had a part time job at a public library in the city and worked each afternoon from 3 until 5 o'clock. She took all honors and advanced courses and wanted to go to college and become a teacher. She hoped to teach elementary school and she visualized her future as combining work with marriage and family.

In her junior year, Alexa's rank in class was second out of 330. During her sophomore year, she was ranked fifth in her class. Alexa indicated that she did about one and one-half hours of homework every night. She was involved in numerous activities and sports, including soccer, French club, and National Honor Society. She and her family were very religious and she was quite involved in her church. Alexa wanted to pursue a career as a teacher or an engineer and planned to attend the large state university less than one hour from her home on a large scholarship. She believed that she was responsible for her own successes because she worked hard and had earned her good grades and scholarships. She never dated anyone during high school and was very family oriented.

Tania

Dressed in a green corduroy jumper and crisp white blouse, Tania, a tall, attractive African American sophomore, exuded a quiet confidence accompanied by a polite friendliness. Despite her fairly conservative clothing, stylish wire-rimmed glasses framed her pretty, expressive eyes complementing a bright smile.

Tania lived with her mother, an older half-sister who was graduating with honors from high school this year and attending college in the fall on a full scholarship, a fraternal twin sister with whom she shares a room, and a younger brother who was in a middle school gifted program. She did not know her father. She had two older half-brothers (20 and 21) who did not live at home and were not working at the present time. She was reluctant to talk about them, but would rather focus on her older half-sister, twin sister, and younger brother. Tania was definitely her own person, but mentioned that she discussed her teachers and courses with her older sister, "learning from her mistakes." The twins were close: her sister was in all the same honors classes with Tania, many of the same clubs, and shared the same clothes. Yet, they were not exactly alike. Tania mentioned that they cannot study together, because her sister needed to take more breaks than she did. Tania was also more athletic and outgoing than her sister, participating in basketball and softball, and assuming leadership positions at school.

Although she hesitated to discuss her house and living conditions, seeming almost embarrassed to do so, she openly respected and admired her mother, naming her the most important and influential person in her life. Her mother, a high school graduate through an equivalency diploma program, did not work outside of her home, had not attended any of her games this year, had not contacted her guidance counselor or teachers, and did not attend school open house functions. Yet, she had a profoundly positive influence on her daughter. Tania described her mother as a woman "who goes after what she wants, an ambitious person." She also stated that her mother was her "first teacher and I think she did

a good job." When Tania was in sixth grade, her mother purchased a piano from an elderly woman with whom Tania was friendly, so Tania could learn to play. Tania taught herself and her twin sister to play "Amazing Grace" and Beethoven's "Fur Elise." Her mother also "lectured" her and her brother and sisters when their grades started slipping, i.e., if they received a C. Homework was important and had to be done first before television or phone conversations, in a quiet setting. The home environment was indicative of support and encouragement of academic achievement.

An active church-goer, her mother encouraged Tania, her sisters, and brother to become involved as well. In fact, Tania's social life on the weekend revolved around church and the teen choir. She spent Friday evenings and Sunday mornings and evenings attending church services, and recently spent an entire weekend at a church teen convention. Tania's friends were her family. She spent time playing basketball with her younger brother in the yard and going to the mall with her sisters. Because of her religious beliefs, she did not attend school dances or go to movies. Yet, she was well-known and popular at school, having been elected president of her class in eighth grade, and again in ninth grade. She used the word "acquaintances" to describe her school social peers. Her connection with boys was strictly on a casual basis. She did not date because, as she stated, this would "bring her grades down." Although dressed in perfectly coordinated outfits each time she was interviewed, she said she does not focus on her looks or "looking good."

As the interviews proceeded, Tania's determination to succeed emerged, accompanied by self-confidence. Her college aspirations were high—Brown, Yale, maybe Harvard, with a major in astronomy or genetics. She planned to apply for every available scholarship. When asked about her future goals, she did not hesitate:

> You want to know what my plan was . . . I'll go to college, have a career, get married when I'm 25, have children when I'm 26 . . . four children, two girls, two boys, and have money.

Tania wanted to be famous in her field, make a contribution, perhaps "discover a planet beyond Pluto."

Another characteristic consistently exemplified by this young woman was a confidence in her ability to achieve her goals. She believed that if she wanted something and was willing to work to attain it, she would succeed. She was a straight A student in all honors classes. Comments on her report cards such as "extremely conscientious," "very bright," "good organizational skills," "enjoys challenges," "self-motivated," abounded each year. Teachers, her counselor, and school administrators often singled her out to participate in special activities such as a trip to Disney World in fourth grade, the gifted program in elementary and middle school, and eighth grade graduation awards. At the time of this study, she was participating in a Pre-Engineering Program (at the State University) which focused on leadership and diversity as well as a residential summer program at a private preparatory school. She accepted all invitations or challenges, even though some involved taking risks such as a summer away from home with a new roommate. She also participated in two sports, basketball and softball. She was not a star in these areas and knew this, but viewed these activities as time for fun and socializing. She did, however, mention the possibility of playing basketball for Brown (whose team, Tania said, "was not that great," so she may be able to be a part of it).

Aware of cultural diversity, Tania's favorite book was *Black Like Me*. She did not feel personally discriminated against and, in fact, did not think there were major problems in her high school. However, her school was comprised of an ethnically and a racially diverse population with the presence of gangs. Not all students or faculty agreed with Tania.

However, she did add a condition: there were no problems in any of her classes, with any of her teachers, or with any of her friends. When asked to describe the ethnic and racial diversity of the faculty, she responded that she never really noticed the color of her teachers' skin. In reality, minority faculty members number very few in her school. She commented that her teachers were encouraging and supportive to the students in class, provided challenging assignments, and were available for student conferencing. Tania rose to this occasion and took advice from teachers, yet had her own inner motivation and ideas as well. Her sense of self, will and ability to achieve, and support from school and home were positive forces in her life. She was a bright, articulate, and personable young woman whose success in school was documented and whose future affords great promise.

Claire

Claire tended to carry her head in a slightly bowed position, but when it was slowly raised, it revealed a broad, effervescent smile. Likewise, her total body language radiated an attitude of positivism. An African American, she was a tenth grade student who was motivated to achieve in academics, as well as athletics, despite a childhood marked by divorce and disruption.

Claire was born in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1978 and lived there until first grade. She moved to Centerfield with her brother Colin, her mother, who was in the process of divorcing her father, and her mother's boyfriend. At the time of this sudden and abrupt move, Claire's mother was pregnant with her half-brother, Terrell. Her mother never married Terrell's father and he left soon after Terrell was born. Claire's father recently told her that had he known that his children would have been moved so far away, he never would have allowed it. As they saw each other several times a year, Claire remained close to her father and had even considered moving back to North Carolina at some point in the future. Her father, a high school graduate, once worked for a computer company but was laid off and was now a truck driver. When he was driving through the area, he always tried to see her.

It was her mother's perspective on life that had the greatest impact on Claire's "just do it" attitude. Her mother attributed her current successes in life to her faith and belief in God. Claire's mother had been promoted several times and was currently a library supervisor in a small college. Also a high school graduate, Claire's mother had attended night school and had enrolled in summer school while she and her brothers were with their father in North Carolina. Originally the courses were in the area of religion, but she was now focusing on a liberal arts degree. A benefit of her current position was that she could enroll as a student and attend classes tuition-free. According to Claire, wanting no special considerations, she had chosen to go through the regular application process that all other undergraduate students go through in order to be admitted. Claire believed that her mother's Christian beliefs helped her to set goals and believe that their accomplishments was a possible dream. The divorce and subsequent disruption in their family life would not have happened, her mother told Claire, if she "had known Christ." Her mother hoped to graduate from college in 1996, the same year in which her daughter will graduate from South Central High School.

Claire's mother's social views influenced her as well. Her mother talked with her candidly saying, "men take time," and that "even Christian men can hurt you." Although Claire had many boys who were friends, she did not have the same need that many girls her age have to be in a steady relationship. A recent romance ended when she discovered that her boyfriend wanted to date her best friend. When she broke up with him she said that she "got over it by focusing on basketball and my studies." She claimed to have no time for serious relationships and felt that she had enough social opportunities through her interests and studies. "People know me! I'm in everything!" Everything included soccer in the fall,

basketball in the winter, and track and field in the spring. The many friendships available through these endeavors sustained Claire.

When she wasn't at an athletic practice, French Club, or a National Honor Society meeting, she was at home studying and "watching out" for her brothers Colin who was 13, and Terrell, who was 9. Home was a triple decker on Broad Street in a neighborhood which Claire originally hated because "it's all Puerto Rican." Asked if she would move out of the area if the opportunity arose, she responded that she had already started over in various schools and wanted to finish at South Central High, a school which she felt had a good reputation and where she was getting a solid education.

Claire attended preschool in North Carolina and moved to Centerfield's Vine Street school area. Her most memorable teacher was Mrs. Scott, "an old woman in her forties who wore thick glasses." Described as a supportive second grade teacher, "she loved me!" Mrs. Scott would allow Claire to attend special presentations in other classes throughout the school. She remembered attending anything that had to do with the human body and medicine. It was during this elementary school year that Claire decided she wanted to be a doctor. By eighth grade, her goal still had not changed. Her mother, realizing the seriousness of her intent purchased a set of medical encyclopedias. They were inscribed with these words: "To Dr. Claire _____, Love, Mother."

From Vine Street School, Claire's mother moved suddenly to another town when she was a fifth-grader. "It made me mad! She was one of only three African American children in the school. Regardless of how everyone tried to make her feel like she belonged, she "hated it" and felt very much like an outsider. At the end of the school year, her mother moved the family back to Centerfield where she again attended Vine Street School for sixth grade. One day in the middle of sixth grade, her mother picked her up at school and announced that they were moving again, this time to the north end of Centerfield to the house on Broad Street. Claire never had an opportunity to say good-bye to any of her friends. She felt a real sense of loss and lack of closure on this part of her life. She was pleased when some of these schoolmates walked up to her and reintroduced themselves as freshman at Centerfield. It gave her an opportunity to explain her sudden disappearance and apparently pleased her that she made an impression on them, so much so that they remembered her three years later.

In 7th and 8th grades Claire attended a junior high school in Centerfield. She immediately recalled how she was "talked about," the gossip revolving around "a African American person getting all As!" She was angry, but "cooled off and did not fight." Seemingly a non-confrontational person, Claire again applied her emotions to achieving rather than defending her goals. Although initially she could not remember any teachers being particularly influential, upon further reflection she admitted that there were teachers "who made you learn." One in particular was her 8th grade science teacher. "I learned everything from her. She taught me a lot. She was the first teacher who gave me a C!"

At South Central High, Claire was encouraged by her guidance counselor to gradually enroll in honors courses. This guidance counselor, who she indicated "adored" her, was disappointed if Claire didn't strive. Knowing that in her academic classes she was always at the top, she persuaded Claire, who took two honors courses in her freshman year, to take three now as a sophomore. French, geometry, and English provided her with ample stimulation and homework. She learned that geometry was hard, "miss a day and you were lost." In a voice filled with amazement, Claire declared that the teacher actually "finishes the book with BOTH honors and academic classes!" She was concerned already about her course selection for next year which would include the following honors courses: Algebra II, psychology, chemistry, composition and literature, and a government course entitled, *You*

and the Law. "I'm going to die!" was the comment Claire made after reciting the list. The only course which she thought provided any breathing space was typing which she was allowed to take with a pass/fail option. Presently, she found the course very competitive and believed there were many others who were brighter. "Everything comes to them easier!"

She spent every weekend working, up to five hours on the computer alone. On Saturday, "I let my body catch back up with me." Claire listened to music, rode her bike, or went to the movies with friends. Unwilling to schedule her weekends, events tended to happen spontaneously. Sunday meant a day partially filled with track meets and church and choir activities. Upon returning from church, she saw her book bag and a "tug-of-war" ensued. Realizing, however, that "homework had to get done," if it was a nice day, Claire pulled the shades down, and burrowed into the books, emerging only when the work was done. "It takes me a long time to think." Frequently this meant that she spent all day preparing for Monday's classes at South Central. "You have to work hard to get good grades," admitted Claire, even though at times it seems "overwhelming."

The adjustment from academic to honors courses was not easy. Admitting that the "academic courses were easy" and that "they didn't help me much," the As were more elusive when she moved up to the honors level and received Bs for most of the academic year, "finally getting an A toward the end of the year."

The amount of homework and studying involved in the honors courses, combined with all of the extracurricular activities made Claire think as if she was "pulled in a lot of different directions." It was hard sometimes and she worried about "burn-out." She felt guilty when she missed a practice, and she had missed many due to testing for the Upward Bound Summer Program, interviews like this one, special projects, and French club responsibilities.

Although Claire was involved in many activities and had many friends, she was not immune from peer problems. A month or so ago she was the target of a lot of gossip for reasons of which she was still unaware. "My name was dragged through the mud." She was particularly put off when people, whom she knew were involved in perpetrating the stories would pretend nothing was going on. This two-faced behavior made Claire feel as if they had "lost their minds!" Upset and crying at home, she tried to talk to her mother, but "my mother harshly stated 'Get over it, Claire!'" She went to school the next day. "I didn't stay home. I had bags under my eyes." If she thought "friends" had been involved, when she saw them that day, she sent them away in disgust. Time passed, and as her mother recommended, she got over it.

Claire was an achiever, a sophomore class officer, winner of many awards and letter jackets. She believed that if you try and you fail, that's good. If you don't try and you fail, that's stupid! A male friend recently told her that he was smart, but he was getting Ds and Fs. She told him that if you choose NOT to be smart, that's stupid. When asked about the peer pressure at play that makes it cool for kids with ability to underachieve, Claire replied, "Girls go dumb when they get to South Central. It must have something to do with boys."

Claire had very strong opinions about male and female relationships. She had been chosen to be part of a health program sponsored by the guidance department called Take Control. She talked with younger girls in her neighborhood about not becoming "accident victims" and sending the message that it's "OK to say no." She believed that many never think of the consequences of disease, pregnancy, and children to raise. She did not feel that mothers and older sisters should end up doing the child rearing. "I'm too strong! I don't have compassion (for girls who get in trouble)." The program will begin its trial run this summer and one can tell that Claire will seriously take the message to the streets.

Claire lived in Centerfield for ten years and although she acknowledged that there was violence, she talked in a matter-of-fact voice about the gangs and shoot-outs. She felt that drugs were a problem in the suburbs, that "there was no money to buy them here." After so much moving in her life, she wanted to get her diploma from South Central, but also said that "anywhere I go, I'll learn." She wanted to do something which will "make an impact" at South Central, especially because "there was no school spirit."

College plans included a big school and her first choice was Brown, although she planned to apply to other Ivy League schools and to the University of Massachusetts. Somewhat hesitantly she added that she will probably apply to Spellman and Howard, traditionally African American universities because, "I'm not cultural. I've got to learn something about my background." She planned to apply for scholarships and finance college by working during school. It was her goal to have all loans paid off in two years after graduation.

The Male High Ability Underachievers

John

John was the beau brummel of South Central High School's senior class. He arrived for his first interview wearing a fashionable trench coat and carrying a matching umbrella. On another day, he wore a sporty outfit which consisted of bright red pants and a matching jacket. Wearing expensive gold chain necklaces and the latest style in athletic jogging outfits, John smiled proudly and explained he owned nine pair of Nike and Adidas running shoes. He admitted that he purchased some of these shoes to match his jogging outfits. He shopped in downtown Centerfield and at an exclusive mall in West Centerfield, and John believed that "clothes made the man."

John had a distinctive look, with a smooth satin complexion a light shade of cocoa brown, the only indication of John's biracial background. John's mother was White, his father was African American. John was over six feet tall and had the muscles of an Olympic runner. He wore his hair very short and was always very clean-cut. He had a warm, friendly smile which he flashed often as he traveled to his classes in a slow, easy going manner. He appeared never to have a care in the world.

The easy going young man, however, had problems in his life. John's family lived in the projects on the south end of Centerfield. His family had been living there for a number of years and they were proud of the major improvements they had made on their modest dwelling. Though the neighborhood was a federally subsidized housing project, John's family took great pride in their modest home and they always kept it in immaculate condition.

John was one of four children in his family. His older brother Kevin was 22 and no longer living at home. He had dropped out of high school and was working as a sales clerk for a major department store in the Centerfield area. John indicated that Kevin had a drinking problem and he was worried about his brother. He explained that his brother became involved with the wrong crowd and had experimented with drugs. John explained that his brother had left that crowd but he was still concerned as he said, "I consider him an alcoholic. He's not drunk all day. He had a good job, but he does drink a lot, more than a normal person would. I guess he can't stop."

John had two older sisters, Amanda, who was 24, was living on her own. She had also dropped out of high school and was currently working at a branch of the Centerfield Public Library. His sister Rochelle was 20 and had undergone some troublesome years. John explained that "she went through a wild stage" and had gotten pregnant. She was not married, was raising her two-year-old son, and had plans of pursuing a program to become a cosmetologist. Rochelle, too, had been a high school dropout.

John's parents had a great impact on him. His father had been kicked out of his home at the age of 18. He came from North Carolina to New England where he met John's mother. He was drafted by the New York Giants to play professional football but his fiancé convinced him that they needed a more sedate lifestyle. The couple was engaged during the Vietnam era. John's father refused to fight in the war since he was a Jehovah's Witness, and a conscientious objector. He spent two years in prison, because of his deep religious beliefs, while John's mother waited for him. John understood the challenges his parents had faced as a young biracial couple and felt strong about his parents' commitment to each other during those difficult years. The family's religious background was something John spoke openly about as he explained that so much of his older siblings' behavior had been contrary to their religious upbringing and had caused his parents a great deal of pain.

John's mother had been employed in the past as a nurse's aide in a home for the elderly, but was not presently working. John's father was a freight truck driver who spent 16 hours a day on the road, working up to 70 hours a week, and then worked part-time as an aerobics instructor for a health club in Centerfield. John's dad took him to the health club and would have his son watch him teach the aerobics classes. John was introduced to the staff and eventually he was offered a job working there after school. When they learned John was mechanically inclined, the health club management asked John to be in charge of repairing the fitness equipment. He was also placed in charge of maintaining the swimming pool, checking the computerized pH and chlorine levels, and making certain that pool maintenance regulations were being followed. John enjoyed his responsibilities at the club and was promoted quickly. Gradually his hours were increased and he was currently working 37 hours a week, with only Tuesdays and Thursdays free.

Throughout elementary school and junior high, John's teachers were puzzled by him as he was obviously very bright. His third grade teacher had written in his report card that "John's laziness was a major problem. He was capable but will do as little as possible." John was described by his fourth grade teacher as "capable but unmotivated." A frustrated fifth grade teacher wrote, "John's intellectual motor was at low idle" while a junior high teacher noted in his records that John was a "very talkative, capable student who had little motivation, a young man who was tardy a great deal." His early childhood report cards were filled with mediocre ratings in all subject areas and by the upper elementary grades and junior high, his report cards were filled with grades of C and D. John's teachers knew he had the ability to succeed in school since his achievement test records consistently indicated reading, math, and language scores ranging from 90th to 99th percentiles.

The only bright spot in John's early educational experiences was the industrial arts program throughout junior high school. In that hands-on program, John excelled. As a child, he reported that he and his friends from the projects spent their summer days taking apart bicycles and rebuilding them into elaborate contraptions they called their "inventions" with extra parts they obtained from a nearby junkyard. John who was repairing equipment at the health club was the same young man who had recently taken apart his parents' stereo system and connected it to their TV set so the family could enjoy television with stereo sound.

Since his freshman year, John's academic record was filled with Cs, Ds, and Fs in academic and general level classes. He was ranked 248th in a class of 330. With his record of high absenteeism, the high school administration had intervened and John's attendance was being monitored by his vice principal. As a senior, he was concerned about whether he would have enough credits to graduate. John was determined to leave South Central High School with his diploma for he wanted to be the first child in his family who reached that important goal.

Benton

Benton had large black eyes and a sad expression on his face. The whisper with which he spoke made one feel as though the young man was unsure of himself and the world around him. The soft-spoken style belonged to a young artist who carried his sketchpad and charcoal pencils in his backpack as he traveled the corridors of South Central High School. The journey through the hallways every day was at times a challenge for this young man, who explained that some heavier, more athletic students were constantly harassing him. He explained, "They always be pickin' on me cuz' of my size!" Benton was five feet tall and thin, a much smaller young man than the other members of the junior class. Benton had delicate, finely sculpted facial features and his hair was shaped in the popular flattop worn by many African American young men at South Central High. He dressed in jeans, sneakers, and T-shirts and was often reprimanded by the faculty for wearing his heavy winter jacket in the building. His teachers explained that his backpack never left him, for he appeared to wear it as appendage, or perhaps as protection from his adversaries in the hallways.

Benton lived in "the projects" on the south end of Centerfield. His neighborhood was a large federally funded housing project. The homes were duplexes of red brick, covered with graffiti and in great disrepair. The streets of Benton's neighborhood were becoming less safe from day to day as regular reports in the *Centerfield Gazette* provided details of drive-by shootings in that area of the city.

The turmoil outside of Benton's bedroom window matched what may have been occurring in Benton's personal life. His bedroom provided a safe haven where he spent time with his artist's sketchpad and his drawing pencils. He explained, "Sometimes when things get crazy at home, I will go to my room for hours and just draw and draw and draw." His sketchpad was filled with finely detailed drawings of super heroes, fantasy illustrations, and child-like cartoon figures, all painstakingly done in pencil or charcoal. The warm, shy smile that spread across Benton's face as he shared his sketchpad and absorbed the complimentary comments concerning his work indicated instantly that Benton's art was something in which he took great pride.

Art may have been Benton's escape from a homelife that was troubled. His guidance counselor explained that his mother had remarried and Benton's relationship with his stepfather was not good. According to the counselor, Benton's mother had expressed that Benton was the son who comprised half of her life. The other half was consumed by her new husband and Benton's 10-year-old brother, Tommy, who caused his mother no problems. Benton's mother had described a violent family fight which had erupted recently where Benton had struck his mother and the Centerfield police had been called to the scene. The family had agreed to have Benton meet for weekly sessions with the school social worker.

Benton's mother had considered sending him to a military school in the South, but his guidance counselor had been successful in convincing the mother that the particular school she was considering had an open campus and that was not what Benton needed.

Both the counselor and Benton's mother agreed that he needed a structured environment. As a single parent for years, Benton's mother had tried a number of strategies with her son. When he was in sixth grade she enrolled him in a magnet school for the arts in one of Centerfield's middle schools. She sent him to an evening adult education art course at a high school in a neighboring suburb, and she had agreed to allow Benton to have a part-time job as a cashier in a local department store.

Benton's elementary school years had been troublesome. He was described by a former teacher as "one of those little disruptive boys who might have been on Ritalin, much different from his younger brother who was so quiet." Benton's story seemed to change when he was enrolled in the magnet program for the arts. He described the program as an exciting school where he studied philosophy, Latin, astronomy, art history, and had small group instruction in advanced art on a daily basis. Since Benton was attending the school out of his district, he eventually was transferred back to his former middle school when space in the program became limited.

Benton's elementary school art teacher described the young artist by saying, "He thought like an artist. He thought in an abstract way. He was very complex." Mr. Diaz, Benton's high school art teacher explained that he "sees like an artist and understands the art concepts far greater than anyone in my classes. He should be painting murals around the world!" The high school teacher was totally frustrated with Benton for he was not achieving in his art class, having produced a portfolio filled with incomplete art room assignments. He felt sick at heart to have to give such a talented young man grades of zero for his incomplete efforts.

Art class was not the only area where Benton was underachieving. His English teacher shook his head and reported "absences and work not made up was what was hurting him in my course." He was failing in English, U.S. History, and chemistry. He had earned a B+ in Spanish and a B in Algebra I. All of Benton's courses were general track classes, yet his teachers and counselor felt he should be taking academic or honors level classes. His achievement test scores had indicated superior ability, with his math and reading scores falling within the 90th percentiles.

Benton's guidance counselor had attempted to help him earlier by introducing him to a young intern in the guidance office named Todd. When Benton expressed a desire to attend a commercial art school after high school, Todd had provided the young artist with some brochures on a commercial art school in Pensacola, Florida. Benton vowed then "he would do whatever it takes to get accepted there."

Benton's typical day consisted of skipping several classes, sleeping in study halls and hanging out with his best friend, Tyson, another fellow artist in the freshman class. Tyson lived in Benton's neighborhood and the two young men were inseparable. Together after school Benton and Tyson would explore the nearby art museum unknown to most South Central High School students. They had also connected with a local street artist named Peter who worked in a nearby shopping gallery in downtown Centerfield. The two young men had convinced Peter to hire them someday as partners. The artist had agreed to provide them with some portrait work once they perfected their shading techniques. Benton and Tyson would check in with Peter from time to time to see if his offer still held promise for them.

Mitch

Mitch looked like a Boy Scout in a Norman Rockwell painting. A clean cut, heavy set young man with sandy brown hair, a round freckled face with braces on his teeth, he

appeared in South Central High's library every day wearing his maroon windbreaker which announced from the back that he was a member of the "1991 Class LL Championship South Central High Football" team. At 5'9' and weighing 270 pounds, Mitch was a third year offensive tackle on the team.

He spoke in a quiet manner and wore a mischievous grin. Mitch had a witty sense of humor and constantly cracked jokes with other athletes who joined him at his self-designated table in the library every day during fourth period.

Mitch was indeed a Boy Scout. He had earned all of his merit badges and was about to become an Eagle Scout. He looked forward to that event when he would be bestowed with the honor in a special Scouting ceremony and would receive a letter from the President of the United States. Mitch was involved in South Central High's Junior Achievement Club and claimed he enjoyed working with money. He had been involved in the club for several years and described his early role in the group as that of "a blue collar worker" but had worked his way up to treasurer and was pleased to be handling the checking account for the group. Mitch had also been on the wrestling team, but left that group after his freshman year because he felt overweight and he was tired of rolling around on the floor with smaller, wiry wrestlers he called "mutants."

Mitch was the eldest son in a family of two boys. His 11-year-old brother was a straight A student who had no interest in sports. Mitch found this trait in his younger brother difficult to understand since he himself was a sports fanatic. His relationship with his brother was not close and he described daily squabbles between the two boys. Mitch's parents were natives of the Centerfield area and both had graduated from local high schools. His mother had been employed for 21 years as a produce clerk in a nearby supermarket. Mitch's dad was a master auto mechanic and had been working for the same company for 11 years. He also worked part-time in the evenings at a gas station around the corner from their home. Mitch described his father's experience in high school by saying, "My father was one of those athletes who said, 'See this school. Let's see how fast we can run and leave it!'" Though his father's school experiences had not been wonderful, both of Mitch's parents were determined to see their sons graduate from college. The family lived in a modest middle-class neighborhood. Their clapboard covered single-family home was well kept and was situated on a quiet side street in the south end of the city.

Mitch's educational experiences in elementary school and junior high were positive. He had attended the same school from kindergarten through eighth grade and became involved in the gifted and talented program in the upper elementary grades. His involvement in the program meant leaving his regular classroom for enrichment activities in a resource room setting. Several teachers reported that Mitch was "a very alert, capable child" while others commented on his need for structure and his tendency to become lazy. His achievement test scores placed Mitch in the 96th and 99th percentiles in reading and math and his report cards throughout elementary school and junior high were As and Bs with an occasional grade of C. Mitch explained his personal theory as to why he did so well in achievement testing. He said:

> Those scores were strong because every year it was the same thing! It was either the bear or the wolf on the cover! They gave you two different tests. One test had a bear, the other had a wolf. You've seen that since second grade so sure, you're gonna' do good!

Mitch arrived at South Central as a freshman and was placed in strictly honors level classes. He achieved grades of Bs and Cs with an A+ in physical education. By tenth grade, his grades dropped drastically to Ds and Fs. Mitch's mother became very concerned

and was in touch with Mitch's guidance counselor on a weekly basis. Mitch claimed the nagging at home never stopped and he described how even the other neighborhood housewives who were friends of his mother were "on his case." Mitch had very close friends in the neighborhood with whom he had grown up. They had all continued high scholastic achievement throughout school, and Mitch was besieged by comments from them as well. Eventually, he told his neighborhood buddies to "mind their own business!"

By his junior year, Mitch's mother demanded that the school guidance counselor place her son in academic level courses. She insisted that he not be scheduled into any honors level classes. Mitch was furious since he wanted to remain with his best friends, yet he was forced to give in to his mother's demands. He did manage to convince his first semester English teacher to allow him to take Urban Literature on an honors level without his mother knowing, and he earned a grade of B+ in a course he found interesting and challenging.

The athletically oriented boy scout had a struggle but he claimed college was in his plans for the future. He explained he wanted to attend a four-year school for a degree in business administration. He hoped he would be able to get into a "good school like Syracuse University," but he realized he might have to attend the local branch of the state university and live at home until he was able to transfer to the university's main branch. He shrugged his shoulders, sighed and said, "What were ya' gonna' do?"

Chico

When Chico's guidance counselor informed him that she had nominated him for a research study and he would be meeting with researchers from The University of Connecticut, he rolled his eyes and said in exasperation, "Why in the world did you go do a foolish thing like that?" He arrived at his guidance counselor's office and stood slouched in the doorway. He checked the researcher from The University of Connecticut over from head to toe and asked, "Are you a professor?" While shaking hands, Chico continued to eye this stranger suspiciously. Not knowing what to make of the situation, he agreed to participate in the study.

The counselor had described him as the "most handsome Puerto Rican male in this high school." Chico was dressed in baggy jeans which hung very low at the waist, exposing the top part of his white boxer shorts. He wore a black crew neck jersey and a gold chain necklace. His outfit was rounded off with a pair of black leather laced boots which reached his mid-calf. He wore the boots half unlaced following the latest style established by the high school's fashion conscious Hispanic population. Chico was indeed a handsome teenager. His short jet black hair was covered by a baseball cap which he wore backwards. His high cheekbones and perfect skin were accentuated by his full jet black mustache and goatee which he kept immaculately groomed. He appeared cool at all times. He cruised the school grounds with a lollipop stick jutting from his mouth in a Telly Savalas style, and he could be seen charming the young female students he met throughout his travels.

Chico was the youngest child in his family. He had seven older brothers and three older sisters, all from his mother's previous marriage. Only one older half-brother, who had left the Marines and undergone drug rehabilitation, was currently unemployed and lived at home with Chico and his parents. One half-sister was living in Puerto Rico. The remainder of Chico's half-brothers and sisters lived in Centerfield or neighboring East Centerfield. Chico explained the family got together every week to watch Sunday afternoon football games on TV, and his mother enjoyed cooking for all of them. Angel, one of Chico's half-brothers, was attending a branch of the state university. Another older half-brother had attended college on a soccer scholarship, graduated with a degree in business administration

and had a high paying position with the *Centerfield Gazette*. Chico explained, "He's the smartest in the family and he's moving up fast!" Chico described Ramon, another half-brother who was serving in the Air Force as someone he admired. He explained why:

> He's cool. He understands. He understands what I go through on the streets. He's been through it, too. Some of my other brothers lecture me and I don't like it. They say, 'Don't mess up in school. Don't start selling drugs. Don't join a gang. Don't do this. Don't do that!' Ramon will tell me the same things, but he won't lecture. He'll say, 'I went through the same things. I know how it was.'

Several of the older half-siblings were married and had children of their own. Chico's mother took care of the grandchildren during the day, having received a license from the state to operate a children's day care in her home. Chico explained, "the state pays for it." Chico's father was employed in an auto parts store in East Centerfield. In an interview with Chico's parents, they explained the marriage had not been happy. Chico's father had been asked to leave the home and had just recently been living at home again, following a car accident in which he had injured his back and been hospitalized. His wife had agreed to take care of him during his recuperation. Chico's mother was quick to point out that her husband slept in a bedroom down the hall. Chico's parents had moved to Centerfield from Bayamon, Puerto Rico, in search of employment opportunities. His father worked in the tobacco fields when he first arrived in this state. He taught himself English after a friendly landlord gave him his first dictionary. Chico's mother admitted that she had not done as well learning the language. She spoke only Spanish and pointed out that this handicap prevented her from venturing out into the Centerfield community often. She stayed close to her neighborhood and explained that she enjoyed shopping only in the Hispanic, family-operated stores on Oak Street in Centerfield since she could communicate easily with the shopkeepers. Chico's mother planned to return to Puerto Rico after Chico had graduated from college.

Chico's home was a modest dwelling situated in the projects on the south end of Centerfield. His parents were proud of their place which was small and cramped with furniture, but immaculate. Chico explained that he did not hang out in his neighborhood often. In this federally funded housing area, he thought the police were constantly harassing teenagers in the neighborhood. He explained:

> Around here, the cops were always messin' with you. You can't hang out and have a good time without the cops stopping you and harassing you. I was in a car with my brothers and we got stopped because we looked suspicious.

Chico also believed that too many fights broke out in his neighborhood, and he described a drive-by shooting that had happened over the weekend in which a car was riddled with bullets from an uzi as a warning from one street gang to another.

Chico was born at St. Xavier Hospital in Centerfield and was a Head Start student at The Sacred Heart School as a young child. He attended elementary school and junior high in Centerfield's public schools. Growing up in a home where only Spanish was spoken, he was placed in the bilingual program in kindergarten and was mainstreamed into a regular program following third grade. His elementary school teachers described him as an "excellent student in all areas" and "a well-behaved quiet boy." His fourth grade teacher pointed out that Chico "was a fine citizen and well-liked by his peers." His elementary school progress reports were superior, and his junior high transcript included a grade record of Bs and Cs. By the time Chico arrived at South Central High School as a freshman, the picture changed. He was enrolled in strictly academic classes in ninth grade. He failed all of his ninth grade classes, with the exception of physical education. Following this dismal

year, he was dropped to general level classes. His high school portfolio was filled with warning notices from teachers which continually indicated a problem with tardiness, absences, lack of completed assignments, and occasional disruptive behavior in class. Chico explained his behavior when he commented, "I just mess around a lot. I just joke around. I talk with the other guys. I'm getting on my teachers' nerves." One teacher had noted, "Chico has a lot of growing up to do. Right now, he does not belong in an academic setting." Throughout the academic warnings, teachers noted his high ability and his active participation in lively class discussions. His math teacher commented to his guidance counselor, "He wants to look to the streets, but he's too smart for that. He's the smartest kid in the room." The math teacher had unsuccessfully attempted to recruit Chico for the school math team.

This bright young math whiz had scored in the 90th percentiles in math as well as in reading throughout elementary and junior high school achievement testing. He explained he enjoyed math and hoped to pursue a degree in business administration following his service in the U.S. Marines. Chico dreamed of owning his own business, "but not a grocery store!," and raising a family "of about three kids."

Morgan

Morgan looked different. In Centerfield's student body of primarily Hispanic and African American teenagers dressed in colorful, flamboyant clothing styles, Morgan might have been mistaken as a visitor from the suburbs. A tall, slender, and handsome young man, he carried himself with a quiet sophistication and spoke in a polite, articulate manner. Dressed in navy blue and white striped jerseys, khaki pants, and docksiders, Morgan did not look like the typical South Central High student. His dark, wavy brown hair was fashionably styled to match his preppy image as he explained, "I try to look different. In this school, everyone looks the same, so I'm happy looking different."

The young man with the preppy image lived in a middle class neighborhood in Centerfield and came from an Irish Catholic family. His father had been studying for the priesthood when he met Morgan's mother, a young woman on her way to becoming a Roman Catholic nun. Both parents were now prominent social activists in Centerfield. His father was employed as a consultant for the city and his work involved many high level community action projects. He was involved in grant writing and high-powered leadership training for a variety of civic-oriented organizations. Morgan's mother was a fourth grade teacher in one of Centerfield's elementary schools. Through their preparation for the priesthood and the convent, both parents had been well-educated and they were now using their education to constantly strive to improve their troubled urban community. Morgan had one sibling, an older sister, Margaret, who was a senior at South Central High School. Margaret was a young woman who had really made a name for herself in the high school through outstanding academic achievement, involvement in athletics, and leadership activities. One of the most active students at South Central High School, Margaret was ranked third in her class and was constantly being recognized for special awards and scholarships. She had accepted a place in the freshman class at Boston College for the upcoming fall semester. Both Morgan and Margaret described their brother-sister relationship as close and wondered out loud what high school would be like for Morgan next year when his "super star sister" was no longer in South Central.

Morgan described a close relationship with both his parents, yet his older sister shed some light on the family dynamics when she said, "Dad is a very calm man and the only time I have heard him yell had been over Morgan's grades." Morgan's recent academic record had become troublesome for the family. Morgan's sister had nominated him for this

study, thinking the interviews with her brother might be helpful to him in better understanding why he was not achieving academically.

A young student teacher in the English department had said, "Morgan's poetry was that of a senior in college. He's brilliant, but he's just doing enough to get by." Morgan was enrolled strictly in honors level classes, but was earning grades of C in English and Spanish. The English teacher, aware of Morgan's parents' high aspirations for their two children, had alerted them of his sudden lack of motivation. Morgan's parents became very concerned about his new laid-back attitude. Morgan was a sophomore, and up until that year, his academic record had been stellar. He was described by one elementary school teacher as "an intelligent, creative child who excels in all areas," while another teacher had commented in his school records that "Morgan was enthusiastic, articulate and creative." His elementary and junior high school records included only straight A report cards and his standardized achievement testing record indicated consistent reading, math, and language scores of 98th and 99th percentiles. Identified for a gifted and talented program in elementary school, he participated in an enrichment resource room program on a weekly basis. Morgan had indeed been *the* model student. His program as a freshman had involved only honors level courses and his academic record that year consisted of strictly As and Bs which placed him 8th in a class of 483.

Morgan, the star student, had also been Morgan the athlete. Having played Little League baseball for several years, he played junior varsity baseball as a freshman but became disenchanted with the coach and the lack of structure on the team so he quit the sport. Morgan had found another niche as a freshman and it continued to be the focal point of his entire South Central High School experience. He was now a member of the swim team and he spent all of his free time by the pool. If his friends or family needed Morgan, they called the swim coach's office to find him. He had been introduced to the teammates by his older sister who was also a swimmer. Through Margaret he found his best friends, a group of young men who were referred to as "the swim team family." These young men ate together in the cafeteria every day, traveled to their honors level classes together, practiced swimming every afternoon, worked out with weights, and hung out together on weekends. Morgan described his new circle of friends as "a close bunch of guys" with whom he felt really comfortable. He had a new girlfriend he had met through the swim team, and they were seen every day involved in private conversation and giggles by the side of the pool. He claimed his high school years so far had been the happiest years, and as for his parents' and sister's concerns about his low grades in English and Spanish and his diminished motivation, he responded with a shrug of the shoulders and a quiet laugh. He said, "I'm just taking this year lightly, I guess."

Skip

Skip looked up from where he was sitting in the North Commons study hall. He was artistically drawing his name in magic marker on the cafeteria table and appeared completely removed from the environment surrounding him. He smiled shyly and agreed to begin the interviews. A handsome young man who stood six feet tall and weighed 180 pounds with a rugged athletic build, he was South Central High's star linebacker. He wore his light brown hair in today's popular short "mushroom style cut" and a tiny diamond earring in his right ear. Dressed in acid washed jeans, sneakers, and a university T-shirt, he walked the corridors of South Central carrying his textbook tucked under his armpit, with the masculine poise of a linebacker and a "devil may care" look about him. Skip's nonchalant manner quickly disappeared as he became involved in conversation about his current high school experiences. He spoke very rapidly, blushing often, smiling shyly and would nervously hesitate or stutter as he openly expressed his feelings. As he spoke, he doodled constantly on the cover of his biology textbook.

Skip was 17 and the second son in a family of two children. He described his older brother, who was 20, as the "fastest runner I know, a guy who could run Olympic speed," yet who had not excelled through his athletic abilities. His older brother was a troubled young man who had dropped out of high school, having repeated the ninth grade three times. Skip had been in his older brother's homeroom as a freshman and believed that his brother had been a negative influence on him since he often convinced Skip and his friends to leave school and explore the streets of Centerfield. His brother was living at home and currently was working for a children's playground equipment company. Skip explained that his older brother had been unemployed off and on since leaving high school and had "been on city," that is, collecting city welfare checks. He hoped his older brother's current job installing playground equipment would last awhile.

Skip's mother was currently unemployed and having difficulty finding a new job. She had been doing clerical work and was released from her position following her employer's budget cuts. Skip explained that "she just sits in front of the TV all day and never talks." He was worried about his mother, feeling that she was just too quiet. He reminisced back to a year before when he remembered seeing his mother in a much different light. He had traveled with Mom to Vermont to visit her sister and had seen her come alive in conversation. He was happy to see his mother enjoying herself so much and commented to her during that visit, "Mom, why don't you ever talk this much at home?" Skip thought that his mother worried all the time and explained, "She worries about how we'll pay the bills, how we'll pay the rent, and she worries about having to find a new job. I think she's just given up." Skip quietly shared that Mom had two nervous breakdowns when he was young and his memories of those years were not pleasant.

Skip's father left the family when Skip was a little boy. He had no childhood memories of his dad since his mother had raised her two sons single-handedly. Dad returned to the family two years ago from California, having been gone for over 15 years. Skip resented his dad's desertion of the family and he said painfully, "Yes, it was hard for us. I don't have any respect for him. I only respect my mom." Skip's father had brought a friend with him from California, a man who was now living with Skip's family. He slept on a sofa in the living room of their apartment, paid rent, but was seldom around. Skip explained that for the past two years, things in his home had "not been so boring" because his father was a talkative man who was "putting energy back into the house." Skip explained "the bad side of having Dad around" was that his talkative father was hot tempered, drank heavily at times, and argued with his mother. Skip's father was employed as a taxi cab driver in Centerfield and had previously been a short order cook, carpenter, and electrician.

Skip's home was on Ashwood Street, less than a city block away from South Central High School. Skip claimed that he could be at school in minutes and explained that was the reason he seldom wore a jacket to school. He often wore short-sleeved shirts in mid-winter but explained that the cold winter air was invigorating against his chest as he ran to school. The homes on Skip's street were historic, Victorian buildings and modest two-family homes. Tucked behind several of these homes was a red brick apartment complex called the "Ashwood Street Apartments." The red-brick, two-story apartment building had 20 apartments and looked like a military barracks with its flat roof. In the parking lot of the apartment building were poverty-stricken characters digging through trash dumpsters. Few curtains hung in the windows of the apartments. Skip referred to his home as "the projects" and explained that his family was the only White family living in the building. He stuttered and said, "It's not a good place to live. We want to move. I stay inside. I don't hang out there, but I can walk to school in five minutes!"

Dolores was a new girlfriend in Skip's life. Because of where he lived, Skip thought he could not entertain Dolores in his family's apartment, so he spent much of his spare time creating ways of getting some quality time with his girlfriend at her home in a neighboring suburb. Dolores, an honor roll student from a nearby suburban high school, had emigrated to this country from Poland and had been introduced to Skip by a mutual friend. He explained she had been his girlfriend "for one month and two days!" He commented that this relationship was the longest he had ever had with a girl, and she was "the best girlfriend I've have ever had."

Skip's counselor was concerned about his lack of motivation academically. He had dropped from an A+ to an F in Geometry and was failing his English class. He had Cs in biology and was also struggling with Ds in French. His accounting class, taught by his football coach, was no problem and he had a B+ average in that course. Skip had failed every course except physical education in his freshman year of high school. Having repeated ninth grade, his current sophomore year continued to be problematic, since he was failing several courses he would need to graduate.

Academics were not always a problem for this young man. Skip's records from elementary school included comments from teachers that indicated they recognized a child with high potential. One teacher wrote, "Skip has a quick mind and was anxious to do well." His sixth grade teacher noted that "Skip learns very quickly and is very good in math." His math achievement test scores were consistently in the high 90th percentiles. Skip's strongest year academically in elementary school occurred in sixth grade when he had a male teacher who provided him great support. His grades that year were straight As and Bs. That teacher recommended him for the gifted and talented program and Skip explained he was placed in the program "because my testing was so strong." Skip enjoyed the enrichment activities the program provided. Several elementary school teachers had commented on his distractibility and his acting out as a young boy. By junior high school, Skip's grades dropped dramatically and his seventh grade report card read, "Skip has become increasingly talkative and he socializes with students who are disruptive and have no interest in school work. They draw him into the group, and in turn, Skip becomes disruptive."

Skip's program at South Central High School included no honors level classes. He was enrolled in academic level courses, and his class rank was 314th in a class of 360. His teachers expressed frustration with his situation, realizing that Skip was an intelligent young man. His English teacher had counseled Skip and told him that he was "one of the brightest students I have had in years" and could not understand why he was not doing his work. His high school records included reports of "major disciplinary offenses" and time spent in the school's in-house suspension center. Attendance had become a serious problem and the high school's administration had established a contract regarding Skip's disruptive behavior and high absenteeism. A university graduate student who served as an intern with Skip's guidance counselor was attempting to monitor Skip's progress on a weekly basis. She, too, was frustrated with his situation and was seeing little improvement.

When Skip did attend school, his free time after classes was spent playing basketball at a local YMCA or "hanging out" with members of the football team in the high school's weight room where we worked out on a daily basis. A fellow member of the football team commented that "Skip's real aggressive on the field, but he's a real goof off in school." His involvement on the football team was important to Skip and he explained, "I may not be confident in school, but I am confident on the field. I have the heart for it. There may be players who are quicker than me, but I have the heart. Heart is having guts, leadership, and a knack for playing the game."

Martin

Martin, a biracial sophomore who lived a gang-infested neighborhood, was a tall, athletic young man. His parents were unmarried. His mother was White and his father was African American. His mother finished high school and college, and had recently returned to school for a second degree. She was a paraprofessional for a long time and was pursuing a career in teaching. His father dropped out of school in eighth grade and was no longer in Martin's life. Martin believed he might even be in jail. His mother moved away from Maine to "get away" from his father. Martin had a younger brother in seventh grade who received all As and was in honors classes. Martin stated that his brother was not as physically active as he and so was able to concentrate more on his school work.

Martin had difficulties with some of his teachers in elementary and middle school. One negative experience happened in second grade with a teacher named Miss B. Marty said that he remembers coming home from school, crying about what was happening in her classes. He did well academically despite these conflicts. On his fourth-grade mastery tests, his language score was 94th percentile and his math score was 85th percentile.

His teachers had mixed comments about Marty. His ninth grade music teacher reported that he was pleasure to have in class. Other teachers stated that Marty lacked self control and didn't work up to potential. One teacher emphasized that removing Marty from his class would alleviate a high stress situation, but he realized that this would be a bad precedent for Marty's academic career. His mother concurred with this analysis, yet believed the work in that particular class was too hard for her son and wanted him to drop some of his harder classes. Despite the recent controversies that Marty encountered, he had won several academic awards, and most recently he achieved third place in the Centerfield Science fair for a project on acid rain. Marty had begun, recently, to underachieve in school at the conclusion of his freshman year and was recommended for the study. His grades had plummeted although his overall average remained high. Many family issues were present and gang issues have begun to be a problem.

Marty also reported that this year was much better for him due to his involvement with the Outward Bound program that he attended the previous summer. It provided him with an understanding of himself, he said. Marty seemed to be an introvert, having only a few close friends. He found it unnecessary to have a large group of acquaintances. Thus, although he came from a hard neighborhood, he had no desire to be a part of a gang, and he stated that he had no involvement with drugs or alcohol.

Marty had an intense interest in basketball, and Michael Jordan and other athletes were big influences in his life. Marty recently joined a hockey team and believed that he was a good player. Besides athletics, Marty was interested in music. Some of the instruments he played were the clarinet, piano, trumpet, and tuba. Other interests included playing chess and acting. Marty planned to go to college to study business and play basketball. He seemed to be a confident young man and described himself as smart, intellectual, and handsome. Unfortunately, he began to do poorly in school again during the second year of the study.

Greg

Greg was an African American who came from a large and happy family. He was 5'9", of medium build, and he wore his hair in clats, a common hair style for adolescent males. Both of his parents lived at home, and he had five older siblings who were all in the field of education. His mother, who finished high school and attended some college, was a hospital technician. His father, who finished high school and subsequently received an

Associate's degree, owned his own construction company. Greg seemed to have a good relationship with his family, indicating that they gave him plenty of time to pursue his interests. He indicated that his mother was his life-long companion who seemed to have a great deal of influence on his decisions. Greg worked with his father on the weekends.

Greg had positive but not extraordinary experiences in school. He recalled two elementary teachers who had been positive influences and made him do his work but also made learning enjoyable. Greg received Bs and Cs in eighth grade. His teachers indicated that Greg could be a good student when he wanted to be. They also reported that he was not always cooperative and at times, disrespectful. Once, he had an extremely bad encounter with a music teacher whom he regarded as a racist. He brought his concerns to the administration but indicated that his complaint was not addressed properly. This year, he found a counselor who was helping him though a challenging biology class.

At the time of the study, Greg had a B average, but his grades were falling and he admitted that he could put more time and effort into his school work. His test scores had been consistently lower since he entered junior high school. Besides biology, he didn't find school very difficult; his favorite classes were math and civics. Greg had good social skills as evidenced by his many friends and his election as president of his middle school. Even though he had been asked several times to be in a gang, he had refused because "he doesn't want to disappoint his family." He had experimented with marijuana and alcohol, but indicated he used it only one occasion when "things were going bad."

Greg was handy and did odd jobs around the house for his family. He said that he had no goals for the future but he would like to be a police officer, but his mother did not want him to pursue that career choice. Greg indicated that he would choose work with children if he did not become a policeman.

Kevin

Kevin was a very tall freshman with a big smile and a positive attitude about school even though he was not working at a level that was commensurate with his abilities. He lived with his mother, biological younger brother, and stepfather in a dangerous gang-ridden neighborhood. Even though his parents were divorced, he had a strong relationship with his father, who was a health care worker. His mother was a secretary and both parents finished high school and received some professional training during or after school. Kevin had been living with his mother and stepfather for eight years and had a positive relationship with his stepfather.

Family was a central focus in this young man's life. Kevin's mother was extremely important to him. She gave him many responsibilities around the house including washing and drying his own clothes. She disciplined him by grounding him, but Kevin reported that he didn't get punished often because he tried to stay out of trouble. Kevin's eleven-year-old younger brother was in the gifted program and was an excellent student.

Until recently, Kevin was been an above average student according to his school records. He was well-liked by all of his teachers and received all As and Bs in all subjects until eighth grade. Kevin indicated that he liked all of his teachers, especially the ones that were "tough" or challenged him. His teachers described him as responsible, friendly, high ability, and a pleasure to have in class. One teacher described Kevin as a natural leader. Kevin proudly stated that he had only missed two days of school in three years. However, Kevin's record in eighth grade reflected a decline in his grades. His lowest grade was a D in reading, but grades in other subjects were lower than they had been before. His eighth

grade teachers reported that he "hasn't been as good a student as he was in the past . . . had not been as reliable as before . . . wants to be accepted by his peers."

Kevin appeared to be a very popular and sociable young man. He had many friends, and because of his strong friendship network, Kevin avoided gangs. He did not experiment with drugs or alcohol. He appeared to have strong self esteem and described himself as helpful, motivated, and athletic. Kevin, who was 6'10", had a strong interest in basketball, and played on the school team. Kevin suggested that basketball enabled him to prove himself as he constantly improved his techniques. Kevin admitted that basketball had taken up a great deal of his time which might have contributed to his falling grades.

Kevin was also musically talented; he played the trumpet and cello when he was younger. Furthermore, he sang in a rap and reggae duet for the recent school talent show. He was a well-rounded individual who had a great deal of potential to succeed in high school and college. Although his grades had slipped, his interest in college had not wavered. He wanted to attend the state university, study science, and become an environmentalist.

Leo

Leo was a fifteen-year-old African American male who was approximately 5'11." He usually dressed in jeans, t-shirt, and a vest, and his hair was in clats, the latest hairstyle among African Americans. He had a passion for music and occasionally was a disc jockey. Leo had intense interests in several areas, yet admitted that he did not achieve to his fullest potential.

Leo's family lived in a gang-ridden neighborhood. His parents were not married, and he lived with his mother, sister, and aunt; his half-brother came to visit him on the weekends. His mother finished high school and had several blue collar jobs. Currently she was training to be a nurse. Leo's father finished high school and one year of college. Little was mentioned of Leo's father, who did not seem to be a big part of his son's life. His grandmother on his father side owned a laundromat, and his maternal grandmother was a vice-president of an aircraft base.

Leo indicated that his younger sister was very important to him, and that he didn't want her to grow up as fast as he did. He wanted her to have a childhood and "stick with her age group." Leo was also extremely close with his mother who was only 32 years old and a single parent. Leo described their relationship in a unique way, explaining that she was a mother when she needed to be but otherwise she acted as if she were a sibling. Recently, Leo and his mother decided to return to their religion and start going to church. This prospect was important to Leo because it was important to his mother.

Throughout elementary and junior high school, Leo had many positive experiences with his teachers. He interacted especially well with his male teachers. For example, Mr. B. helped him to see that his sometimes uncontrollable anger and temper were harmful to him. Leo always felt very comfortable with him. His current gym teachers, both male, encouraged him to pursue football, but Leo decided to concentrate on his studies. One other teacher Mr. R., also made Leo comfortable and recognized when Leo was upset or angry. Leo's temper may have been the reason that he had been suspended once for getting into a fight. More recently, however, Leo was known around school as the peace maker, or one who stopped fights.

In elementary and middle school, Leo did well academically. He was in speech therapy for a while to correct some problems and he remembered doing better in middle

school than he did in grammar school. As a freshman in high school, he was having more difficulty with his studies but liked math, English, and art; yet he was failing World History. Leo indicated he put forth a lot of effort into his English class which he finds challenging as he read thirty-two books in the previous semester.

Leo reported that he had several friends and that he respected them and himself. He had not experimented with drugs or alcohol and had stayed away from gangs. He had not had any problems with truancy and seemed to like school. He wanted to go to college to study engineering or electronics so that he would be well prepared for a future in the music industry.

Marwin

Marwin was a young male who had shiny, hazel eyes, light brown hair, and a timid smile. He wore oversized blue jeans, white T-shirts, a blue sweater worn backwards, and leather boots adorned with Big Bird, Bert, Ernie, and Cookie Monster band aids. To complement his fashionable look, he wore two small diamond earrings in his left ear. Marwin was a ninth grader who liked writing, who enjoyed listening to heavy rock and reading terror stories, especially from the popular author Stephen King. A sixth-grade teacher described him as a "creative writer." In addition, Marwin reported that he was good at crafts. He made bracelets, key chains, and "other stuff" with a craft string called "gimp." On weekends, he went to a nearby city to stay at an uncle's house. During this time, he had the opportunity to spend time with his "real friends." In their company he roller skated, played racquetball, tennis, and other sports.

Marwin was the youngest of three children. Peter, his older brother, was eighteen. He attended a suburban high school in the community in which he lived with his grandmother. Leesandro, his seventeen-year-old sister, lived at home and was a junior in high school. Marwin also had a stepsister, Griselind, who was twenty years old and lived by herself. She dropped out of school and was currently unemployed. His mother, who was of French descent, and his Puerto Rican father were high school dropouts and currently unemployed. Marwin indicated that the idea of dropping out of school was on his mind every day, but he planned to stay and finish high school.

Marwin aspired to own his own auto mechanic business. Unfortunately, Marwin's actions and behaviors hindered these goals. For example, during the first three marking periods, Marwin's report cards were filled with grades of C, D, and F in academic and honors level classes. His extensive record of major disciplinary offenses included the following: defiance of authority, verbal confrontation, vandalism, cutting teacher's detention, and being off school grounds. In addition, academic warnings in his permanent file cited: failure to do homework properly, inattention in the classroom, lack of interest, lack of study skills, and detention. Inside and outside suspension were among the disciplinary actions taken against him.

In interviews, Marwin's counselor described him as a "charming boy who is not working up to his potential." She wrote in his file, "Marwin tests post high school in all areas but he had great difficulty in high school and was, in fact, socially promoted from the eighth grade. His behavior and lack of effort hurt him." During Marwin's early elementary years, he consistently received As and Bs on his report cards and participated in the gifted and talented program in fifth and sixth grade. Nevertheless, his academic status started to change after fourth grade. In fact, teachers' comments on his cumulative file recorded the onset of his underachievement:

> Marwin appears to be a very capable young man. He writes well—clear and organized. He had some difficulty staying on task and completing work on time. He has ability but lacks motivation. (Fifth grade)
>
> Marwin has excellent potential. He has been doing good work, but he has become increasingly disruptive in class. (Sixth grade)

Milton

Wearing two gold loops in his right ear, a black leather jacket, white T-shirt, blue jeans, and untied black boots, Milton showed up in the front door of the conference room inside the guidance office and said, "Hey! I'm in school but I am not attending classes. I'm here because of my girl. I have to wait for her to walk her home after school. So, if you want, we can talk now." Milton's black "Vaseline style" hair, soft black eyes, and light skin tone him made him extremely handsome.

Milton was frequently absent, and by the end of March, had been absent 37 school days during his freshman year of high school. Tardiness also affected him. If Milton attended school, only his English and Spanish teachers usually saw him in class, as cutting classes were part of Milton's school routine.

Milton was the oldest child in his family. He had a younger brother, Wilfredo, who was very close to him. Wilfredo attended junior high school and was following in his brother's steps. Milton explains, "He's failing like me. If I do something, he'll do it too. . . . We don't need to finish high school." Milton also had a younger handicapped sister who received special services. She was enrolled in school but spent most of her time at home. Milton's parents were divorced and the children have no contact with their father. Their mother had custody and she was currently unemployed, but "receives help from the state." In addition, the mother's boyfriend was living in the family's home. According to Milton, his mother's boyfriend was a nice guy who held a good job and helped his mother. Milton's family lives in the north side of the city, "the most difficult and violent neighborhood in Centerfield" according to his guidance counselor.

Milton first came to the United States when he was six years old. He was placed in a transitional, full-time, bilingual program where he stayed until fourth grade. During these years, teachers described him as "an excellent and highly motivated student," "very efficient and cooperative child," a student with "excellent math and reading skills," and "responsible and well mannered."

In fifth grade, he was mainstreamed to an all-English classroom. By sixth grade, he was described as "a careful worker," and he was making excellent progress in school, especially in mathematics. His high abilities enabled him to be placed in a classical magnet program during his seventh and eight grade. His seventh grade report card was filled not only with As and Bs but also with teachers' comments such as "fantastic student!," "creative and very ambitious," "good thinker," "the best!," "powerful!," and "a pleasure; just wonderful." However, at this time, a slight problem began with his attendance as he began missing school. By eighth grade, the picture started to change, especially during the second, third, and fourth marking periods during which he received grades of Ds and Fs. He was an "outstanding student [in] the wrong direction" according to his teacher's comments which also cite his "poor attendance and irresponsible, truant attitude." Milton was supposed to attend a gifted program in a nearby high school, but following his friends, he refused to attend the gifted program and enrolled at South Central High School where his freshman year was not different from the final stages of eighth grade. Grades of Ds, Fs, and a high level of absenteeism characterized his actual academic status.

The Female High Ability Underachievers

Mandy

Mandy was an outgoing, upbeat young woman with dark eyes and black hair swept up into a pony tail, and an outgoing personality which made her a pleasure to interview. She was a senior in high school who spoke freely and with great detail about all of her school experiences and seemed to want to talk about all aspects of her life. She wore glasses and hearing aids in both ears, and was always dressed neatly. She was heavyset and complained about her weight during several interviews. She had a boyfriend who was a major focus of her life and she mentioned him constantly and often brought the interviewers up to date on her relationship with him before getting into other aspects of the study.

Mandy clearly realized that she was underachieving in school and spoke at length about all of the reasons for her underachievement. Mandy had a number of family problems that she acknowledged contributed to her underachievement. Her father and mother had a stormy relationship since they were teenagers which caused Mandy many difficulties. Her father was African American and her mother was White. They met in junior high school and dated periodically throughout high school. Mandy's dad was a high school football star and her mother became pregnant while still in high school. Mandy's father had a volatile temper, and drug problems. Mandy's parents lived together and separated several times, and physical abuse had been reported on several occasions. Her mother did not graduate from high school. Her father was unemployed and was currently supported by her mother who worked in a clerical position. Mandy was very bitter about her father and believes he was a drain on her family. He had several other relationships with other women and had three other children from these relationships. Mandy's hearing problems did not, she believed, contribute to her underachievement. Instead, she acknowledged family issues and her lack of motivation to study, despite her understanding of how important it is to do well in school.

Mandy participated in several activities, including serving as the manager of the girl's basketball team. She was also the announcer of the news in school in the morning, was active in several clubs, as well as school and community organizations. She participated in Upward Bound, and several other programs to help her academically. She was accepted at several colleges but decided to attend a two-year college that is known for preparing young women for clerical careers. She did not receive the scholarship aid she needed to attend other colleges that were first choices for her. Her boyfriend seemed to have a major impact on her life and she acknowledged the importance of his role in her life. She planned her days around him, and he was a big part of her future. She wanted to own her own daycare center, and planned to have a large family with eight or ten children. Her level of underachievement seemed to cycle around the personal issues such as her parents' problems, her boyfriend, and her own desire to do "things" other than academic work.

Sandra

Sandra had long, curly, black hair, and dark brown eyes accentuated by long black lashes, full lips highlighted by scarlet red lipstick, and light bronze skin. A cotton shirt with white, long sleeves, light blue jeans, a fashionable necklace, big silver loop earrings, a black belt, and black shoes rounded out her Latino look.

Sandra appeared to be a cheerful, energetic, and outspoken. She played softball, enjoyed dancing, rap, club and Spanish music. She also sang and played both the guitar and the flute. She liked writing, but above all, she "loved" reading, especially psychological,

thriller/suspense stories and books by African American authors, V.C. Andrews, and Stephen King. In this respect, an English teacher from a local summer program referred to Sandra as a "voracious reader" and added that "in this age of video distractions, her talent should be nurtured." Sandra's outstanding academic achievement led her to receive a scholarship to attend the summer program in 1991 at a nearby prep school.

Sandra lived with her parents, an older sister and a younger brother. Her family used to live in the "projects" but recently moved to a "White neighborhood." She reported:

> My family was one of the few families in the projects that I can say that I know that don't rely strictly on the government for like aid because my father works and because my mother wants to make such an honest living. . . . We moved to a White neighborhood with our own house and it had an above ground pool and everything and was like we were the only Puerto Ricans there and my parents were constantly afraid that something was going to happen. I have been called the high class Puerto Rican. It is not true. [She added the following comment.] Because we were Puerto Ricans, we all have to live in certain neighborhoods with old dilapidated buildings. On top of this, we don't have to have roaches in the house. This makes us high class!

Her mother was a housewife who only had a fourth grade level of education. Sandra described her mother as ". . . a little cuckoo and clinically depressed." Her father was a machine operator in a factory. Her older sister was nineteen years old and attended the local university. Her little brother was seven years old and attended first grade. Both her sister and her brother were adopted. Actually, Sandra always believed that she was also adopted but her parents never confirmed this which provoked many confusing feelings.

As an elementary school student, teachers described Sandra as "a very good, obedient girl," "an excellent and enthusiastic student," "bright but tends to be careless," "very eager to learn," and "tends to finish work too quickly." Sandra participated in a bilingual program until third grade and then she was mainstreamed to an all-English classroom in fourth grade. At this time, she was identified as gifted because of ". . . above average intelligence, leadership, and creativity . . ." She was part of the gifted program from fourth to sixth grade and during this time her grades were outstanding.

Sandra's junior/high school years were "harder" and more competitive. She acknowledged being angry often and experiencing "a lot of problems" because "people couldn't stand her." She further explained: "I used to get like Cs. I got lazy. I went from my straight As in elementary school to like Bs and Cs." In tenth grade, her grades were mostly Bs and As. However, she got a D in an algebra honors level class. In eleventh grade, Sandra got a C in a geometry honors level class, and a D in U.S. History. Currently, in her senior year, Sandra was failing biology and was doing only average work in Spanish. Some of her high school teachers depicted Sandra as a "very creative writer and original thinker, a good speaker, and one of the best, if not the best, student in her speech class." She felt "lazy" but "would do her work for some classes if she feels like doing it."

In ninth grade, Sandra wanted to be a criminal defense lawyer, "to defend criminals," but a major life event changed her opinion. Her mother's mental illness and the demanding responsibilities on Sandra resulted in an attempted suicide when she took an overdose of her mother's psychiatric medicine. Her experiences during this time helped her to reevaluate her career goals, and for a period of time her underachievement abated. Currently she planned to be a pediatrician and she had been accepted at a state university where she planned to major in biology and "hopefully" to attend medical school.

Rose Marie

Every morning from 7:25 to 7:35 a.m. in the North Commons area of their high school, the members of the Bible Study Club and guests got together to praise the Lord. Close to this circle of people praising the Lord was Rose Marie playing some delightful flute music. Immediately after finishing the morning prayer, Rose Marie ran to her homeroom to avoid being marked absent. Then she ran again, but this time down to the main office to read the school announcements over the intercom. Finally, Rose Marie started her classes. After four classes, one study hall and lunch, Rose Marie attended the nearby Academy of Performing Arts. At the Academy, she had three additional art classes. After school, she attended sports practices, running cross country during the fall and gymnastics during the winter. She also ran track and played basketball during the spring. In addition, she was part of the French Club and the Peer Counsel Program. Rose Marie also participated in a church youth group and dedicated time to her boyfriend.

Rose Marie had dark-brown eyes and black hair. She was born in New York but came to this state from New Jersey. Rose Marie, her mother, an older brother, and an older sister lived in Centerfield, since 1986. Her father lived in New Jersey and had minimal contact with his children. Rose Marie's parents divorced when she was seven years old. Her mother was a visiting and home care nurse who "lives for her children." Rose Marie's brother was nineteen years old and was currently attending a community college. Rose Marie explained that the relationship with her brother was "a little difficult." Her sister was eighteen years old and was a senior at a nearby suburban high school. Her sister formerly attended South Central High School and, although she had to commute thirty minutes to go to school, she decided to leave South Central High School because her best friends were attending this other high school.

A review of Rose Marie's academic path revealed a paradox. Achievement test scores indicated that Rose Marie had high abilities in mathematics and language. However, she displayed below average performance as evidenced by Ds and Fs in her grade report cards, poor study habits, and chronic lateness. Rose Marie often "escaped" from a sometimes frustrating situation by attending the Academy of Performing Arts. Rose Marie reported that besides mathematics and sports, she "loved" writing and reading poetry. She enjoyed drawing, playing the flute, and art in general. During her first year at the Academy, her grades and teachers' observations were impressive. Her report cards were dominated by As and Bs. In addition, most teachers' observations were encouraging. Only a few statements pointed to weaknesses affecting her performance such as "her focus and concentration could be better" (movement for non-majors teacher).

Regarding her academic path, Rose Marie explained that her grades were "excellent" until third grade when they started to drop. She also mentions that her situation was further complicated by junior/high school. "By the time I was in seventh or eighth grade, I had built a reputation of being such a nothing, a nobody." At the time of this study, Rose Marie was failing three out of six classes at South Central High School. However, her intentions were " . . . to get better grades. I am going for straight Bs. I know I can do it." In the future, she wants to attend a Christian college and major in communications to be able to eventually work for a radio or TV station. She also expects "to marry someone forever and wait two years to have children. I would like to have a huge house with a bunch of children."

Yvellise

Brick-red framed, slightly tinted eyeglasses camouflaged Yvellise's light-brown, shiny eyes, but complemented her sand skin tone. Wearing little make-up of a peach shade,

gold loop earrings which stood out from her long chestnut hair, a long sleeved yellow silk blouse, dark blue jeans, brown suede shoes, and manicured long nails, she smiled shyly and spoke in a soft voice that indicated a kind personality.

Yvellise lived with her parents and two older sisters having moved several times between the States and Puerto Rico. Her family had lived in Centerfield since 1991. Her mother was a housewife who was experiencing a difficult time because one of her brothers was hospitalized with AIDS. Her father owned an auto parts store in Centerfield in partnership with a brother-in-law. Yvellise's oldest sister was twenty-five years old and planned to attend college in the near future. Her older sister was twenty-two years old and was currently attending a state college majoring in psychology. Yvellise was more comfortable with this twenty-two year old sister because they shared similar interests.

At the age of eight, when Yvellise first arrived in the United States, her parents immediately enrolled her in third grade where Yvellise was placed in a bilingual program. The transition was not easy for Yvellise but her fifth grade teachers described her as "a nice girl" who "likes to work hard" and "very motivated regarding school work," but still "could do better work." Her fifth grade report card indicated Bs and Cs and a teacher's note: "Yvellise puede mejorar sus notas ya que tiene el potencial y no lo está usando al máximo." (Yvellise could improve her grades because she has the potential, but she is not using it to the maximum.) Then, her family returned to Puerto Rico. Two years later, Yvellise's family returned again to the United States. This time, Yvellise began eighth grade and was again enrolled in a bilingual program. Her school performance was excellent as evidenced by mostly As on her report card. Teachers depicted Yvellise as a "top student" who did "outstanding work" and had "mature, excellent behavior." Other comments included, "Her English has really improved," and "I enjoy having her in class." In her cumulative record, the following note appeared: "She was a very bright student, mature, well-behaved, and developed an excellent command of English. She had high potential."

Currently, Yvellise was in ninth grade at South Central High School. Regarding her own academic performance, Yvellise stated:

> I don't have the grades that I used to have. I want to do better, but I don't know . . . . I don't like coming to school, but I have to. I am not doing as good as I should. I can get Bs and Cs without studying and As if I really work hard. I can pass without studying hard.

Her report card displayed Bs and Cs. Her counselor expressed his concern about Yvellise's academic performance as follows:

> I know she is a bright girl and I don't want to see her wasting her potential as many other students [do] in this school. I want to prevent major problems. She has the potential to do excellent in mathematics; but although she was not failing the class, she was getting Cs. One of her teachers says that she was "too easily satisfied."

Although Yvellise displayed a high potential for mathematics, her opinion about her abilities was exactly the opposite. She explained, "I don't like mathematics at all. I am not good at it." Yvellise planned to graduate from high school and to attend college. She wanted to major in business administration or communications. She envisioned herself with a good career, "a high rank job position, a nice house, a nice car, two or three kids, and married for a long time."

Ivy

Prior to introducing the researchers to Ivy, her counselor said, "A very bright girl, she gets excellent grades when she really wants to. A sometimes stern-looking face, that's Ivy." As she entered her counselor's office, Ivy, an attractive adolescent dressed in fashionable outfits, looked at other people with indifference.

Ivy was born in the States, but spoke Spanish fluently since her parents and most relatives were originally from Puerto Rico. Her father, who was 41 years old, lived about 40 minutes away and had not seen Ivy in five years. Until the third week of May, Ivy lived with her mother, who was 31 years old (she was also attending high school), her mother's boyfriend (who owns a grocery store), an 11-year-old brother, and a six-year-old sister. Ivy mentioned that although her mother's boyfriend lived with them, he was like a stranger to her because she hardly ever saw him. He frequently was not at home, however when he was at home, he watched TV. She remarked that talking about her brother and sister was difficult because her communication with them was superficial. At home, they wanted to be with her and were always following her everywhere, and never let her do her homework. She believed that they were too young to understand her and she did not like to talk about "her things" with them. On the contrary, her mother was young enough to be able to understand her, "I can communicate with her; she knows everything about me." Unfortunately, her mother's attitude created many disagreements between them. For instance, her mother, believing that her daughter did the same things that she did when she was fifteen years old, never trusted her. Ivy, gloomily claimed that she never did "what she was not supposed to do." She also complained about her mother's ignorance and unwillingness to encourage her daughter to reach academic goals:

> She doesn't push me to do my homework or get good grades. When I am studying, sometimes she starts arguing with me. I try to ignore her, but she continues and don't let me study.

According to a report of suspected child abuse/neglect, her apparent unwillingness to wash the dishes had caused her mother to hit her on the eye and bridge of the nose. Her grandmother, aware of the situation, understood Ivy's reasons for not wanting to live with her mother anymore and allowed Ivy to move into her house. Despite her grandparents' lack of interest in her everyday life, Ivy expressed happiness about being with her grandparents:

> My grandmother won't want to hear about my boyfriends. She was shy; she just wants to hear when I read the Bible. We don't really talk about personal things because she was older [47 years old]. I talked with my mother about everything because she was young. My grandfather, he don't get into other people's business. I don't care if he was there. We hardly ever talk. We just say hi and bye. He was in his own world, but I'm happy there and I really like my grandmother.

Ivy displayed a remarkable ability for high academic performance. However, consistently throughout school she had poor motivation to achieve and repeated conflicts with certain teachers and peers. When recalling her past school experiences, Ivy pointed out that her second grade teacher was certainly not her favorite, her third grade teacher was a "pain," her sixth grade teacher yelled at her all the time, but that her fourth grade teacher loved her. Having no children, this teacher used to invite Ivy to her house for lunch and used to buy her toys. Although Ivy believed that all the subjects have always been very easy, she had difficulties in her seventh grade courses. Her mathematics teacher was a "pain in the neck," she disliked her English teacher, and her social studies teacher was so

unfriendly that one day she slammed and broke her classroom door. Conversely, when she was in eighth grade, she got As in all her classes and her teachers loved her. She received Mr. Defemin's (the principal's name) award and her English teacher cried when she graduated.

In her cumulative school record, both her grades and teachers' comments about her performance were either excellent or poor. For instance, her grades at the beginning of 1991 were Ds and Fs, and the teachers' comments ranged from "does not complete assigned work" to "discourteous and disrespectful." Conversely, her grades at the beginning of 1992 were As and Bs and the teachers praised her self-motivation, responsibility, and ability to think quickly. Her eighth-grade counselor commented that Ivy showed a "complete turnaround from Fs in seventh grade to honors in eighth grade; from fighting and hostility, to discussing and solving her problems."

During one academic year, Ivy was taking one honors class and believed that all the subjects were easy for her, even history which she found dull. Her favorite subject was mathematics and she did not spend more than 15 minutes studying because she "will pass anyway." She indicated that she was smart but she believed that the key was not "being smart," but not "being lazy." Her grades this year were mainly As and Bs and, although she did not work hard for her French class, she always got a B.

> It seems I know it all in French. I feel I don't have to do anything. Sometimes students don't understand and I get mad and impatient because they were not ready and we spend more time. They waste time.

This semester she wanted to do her best work in English all the time because she believed her teacher was very interesting. He was born in Puerto Rico and was still not married. Ivy admired him for having been able to grow up and study in such a difficult place as New York. Ivy was also enjoying her health class because her teacher "was the kind of person who respects you if you respect her."

Ivy mentioned that at school she did not talk to anybody that she did not know. She attended her classes, paid attention, and studied. Several people told her that she had a "mean look" and for this reason, she did not get along with many of her classmates. One day, a girl in her mathematics class started to fight with her since she believed Ivy "looked at her wrong." Ivy thought that having too many friends was a bad idea because "the more people you know the more you get into trouble." People liked to gossip, especially girls; therefore, all Ivy's friends; except one, were males.

> Girls like to talk about other people. I don't like people like that. If I tell them something, they don't keep it for themselves. There are only a few people I like to share things with. I prefer to tell my things to the boys. My best friend is Julio, he is 18 and goes to Catholic school. I used to tell him everything about me. He understands everything, he knows what to say, he gives good advice. I value the friends who never turn the back on you.

Although Ivy mentioned that she was happy in her present high school, she thought it did not provide the best education. The school was "too much fun" and students could leave whenever they wanted without being caught because there were not enough security guards. Ivy thought that her high school had problems because Centerfield, having so many people killing each other, was a "mess." She further complained that many gangs existed in the school and were fighting against each other for "stupid little things." In her opinion, social problems in her city were the same ones that affected her school: crime, poverty, and family problems among others. According to her experience, discrimination was not a

major issue. She believes that the only ethnic group that was occasionally discriminated against were the Chinese.

Since Ivy did not have many friends at school, she spent most of her free time with her neighbors. Sports were never a major concern in her life. She liked to watch soccer and baseball on TV, but never enjoyed playing them. In her opinion, gym classes at school were boring; she would have preferred swimming classes.

With respect to her future goals, Ivy recognized that she did not have a clear idea of what she wanted to do in the next years. When she was in elementary and middle school, her dream was to become a lawyer, but she heard this would require many years of study. Then, she decided to become a psychiatrist, but again someone told her that this would require even more years of study. She currently wanted to become a stewardess and thought this would be a final decision. However, she had also considered studying accounting because her father told her that accountants had to "deal with money." Her mathematics teacher mentioned that it would not be too hard for her to go to college since people in her city could get scholarships very easily. Nevertheless, she believed that being so lazy and having gotten poor grades in previous years represented a barrier when trying to obtain a scholarship. She also recognized that her interest in attending college was not very strong and preferred not to make this kind of plan because she had never been able to fulfill her dreams.

When thinking about her future, Ivy imagined having her own apartment, working, and earning enough money to buy clothes and shoes. She envisioned having a husband, two kids, a house, and a "little job" so that she did not have to depend on a man. She thought she might marry a neighbor who had told her about his plans to study medicine and marry her. Having a boyfriend at school did not interest her because "they were all little kids who just want to get sex." Ivy had a fairly clear idea of the kind of man she would eventually want to marry "he has to be older, he must respect me, he ought to have a job, or be studying, or be going to finish school." When dating someone, she was not concerned about her looks, she was only interested in wearing comfortable clothes, "How I look, I don't care. I don't care what they say and think."

CHAPTER 6: Results of the Cross-Case Grounded Theory Analysis

The findings discussed in this chapter are divided into four sections. The first involves the factors influencing achievement which emerged from the cross-cultural high ability achievers in the study which comprised the core category for this group, and the second, the factors influencing underachievement which comprised the core categories that evolved from the high ability cross-cultural underachievers. In the third section, the research questions that guided the study are addressed, and in the fourth section, the cross-cultural differences that emerged between the students who achieved and underachieved, as well as the differences between African American and Puerto Rican male and female students who achieved and underachieved in school will be discussed.

Factors Influencing Achievement

The factors identified by the participants as influencing their achievement in high school are: belief in self; personal characteristics (sensitivity, independence, determination to succeed, appreciation of cultural diversity, inner will, resilience); support systems (network for high achieving students, family support, supportive adults); participation in special programs, extracurricular activities, and summer enrichment programs; appropriately challenging classes; and realistic aspirations. It should be noted all participants, regardless of gender and cultural group, identified these factors as contributing to their academic success; however, the factors varied in the level of importance by gender and cultural group. These differences will be discussed later in this chapter.

Belief in Self

The development of a strong belief in self was evident in all achieving participants. The oldest participants in the study exhibited the strongest belief in themselves, possibly indicating that this belief may develop over time and because of various circumstances and experiences. The younger students in this study (freshmen and sophomores) were confident about their ability to succeed, but the juniors and seniors exhibited stronger beliefs about who they were, what they wanted to achieve in life, and the direction they needed take to realize their goals. This sense of self developed despite the urban environment which resulted in negative circumstances including economic struggles and poverty, the pervasive availability of drugs, gang and community violence, and family or peer group problems. A guidance counselor poignantly described their situation, explaining:

> These kids bring a tremendous amount of baggage to school. We don't know what they are carrying with them every day. They may look perfectly healthy and normal, but their households! They are unbelievable. These kids are driven! They are competitive. They can compete anywhere because they want it. They are survivors. They have survived in an inner city so they know they can survive anywhere. They feel comfortable applying to places like Brown University.

The guidance counselor who described the high ability achievers at South Central High School spoke with conviction about the young people who worked to make better lives for themselves. The "competitive, survivor quality" appeared to be a reflection of a strong belief in self within these young people. This strong belief in self was evident in all of the participants who were academically successful at South Central High School.

According to the participants in the study, this strong belief in self was due to several factors or influences including: supportive adults, extracurricular activities, appropriate educational opportunities, family support, peer support, and various personal characteristics including sensitivity, multicultural appreciation, aspirations, motivation, inner will, and resilience. Commenting on the development of his own belief in self, Vaughn described his involvement in a self-contained gifted and talented class in elementary and junior high school. He said:

> We were the only class separated from the rest. We didn't switch. We were with the same group of people all day. We were separate from the rest of the school, so we knew we were labeled the nerd class. Some of the people in there were nerds but I had a lot of friends in many of the other classes. I knew a lot of kids from Little League. I got along with everyone. I knew who I was.

Because his parents were divorced and his father was away many evenings while he taught adult education classes, Vaughn spent a great deal of time alone at home as a young boy. He believed this helped him develop a belief in independence as he had learned at an early age how to entertain himself, and he enjoyed being alone and was very comfortable with himself. He had no qualms about applying to universities on the west coast and being over 3,000 miles away from his parents. This strong belief in independence was voiced by Vaughn when discussing the future. He was not concerned about applying to colleges, for he explained, "If I don't get in, I'll join the Peace Corps!"

Vaughn was one of only four males in the senior class at South Central who belonged to the National Honor Society. He was proud of this accomplishment but explained that this pride in his academic achievement had developed only during his years at South Central. As a freshman he was awarded a jacket at an awards assembly for his strong record but did not wear it the following school year to avoid ridicule from peers who may not have appreciated his academic achievement. He explained that he became comfortable enough to wear the jacket during his senior year. He had become more confident of himself and he knew he maintained the respect of his peers. In all the interviews with Vaughn, he emphasized his independence and how this attitude affected the way he perceived his academic responsibilities. He explained:

> I don't worry about my grade point average. I worry about learning. I don't care what the teachers think of me, as long as I am learning, as long as I am enjoying what I am studying. Grades aren't important to me. It's what I am really learning that counts.

Marisa's belief in herself emerged over the years she was in high school and by her senior year, it was demonstrated in numerous interviews. One representative comment provided an example of this:

> I want to be successful so I just go and do as much as I can. I like to learn. I do. I like experiencing new things and learning about new things. If I don't know something, I want to know everything—a little of everything. I want to be well-rounded in everything.

While observing Lucio in an English Literature class, it became apparent that he, too, believed in himself. In a discussion about the novel *Jane Eyre*, Lucio led the group with thoughtful questions for the teacher as well as insightful comments made to other students throughout class discussion. When asked about the discussion, he explained the reason for his intense class involvement:

> I think I resemble that little girl in the novel. That's why I am enjoying it. She was different. I feel the same way. I never really cared about being the most noted, being the class president. I never really cared for that kind of stuff. I just want to be able to be myself. If people don't like the way I talk or the way I think, there are a couple of adjectives I can use to describe them! [laughs] I am happy with who I am and I have friends.

Toni, an African American high achieving student who lived in a housing project also consistently emphasized her belief in herself:

> I have confidence in myself. I believe that I can do it. I'll have the house that I want, the car that I want, if I'm married the kids I want! If I'm not married I will still be a virgin. I also believe I can help my mother out, too, moving her away from the project.

Toni explained how different she was from other girls with whom she used to be friends. The girls, she explained, date and have relations with many boys. Many got pregnant and many had abortions. Toni had a different belief about herself and she knew what she wanted for the future: college, a career, and a different kind of life.

Rafael, the participant from Puerto Rico who was mainstreamed out of a bilingual classroom after a short period in the United States, described his belief in self when he discussed how he used to compare himself to other students when he first arrived in this country and eventually he learned to focus on his own abilities. He said:

> I used to compare myself to Diego [the valedictorian] but I stopped doing that because I realized that I had to take care of myself and discover what I was capable of doing. I knew that when I was playing baseball I learned that if you concentrate on what you are doing rather than what others are doing, you are going to do much better. You'll have all your attention focused on your situation. You have to be aware of the people around you but giving more attention to your situation will get you further.

Wallace, who was African American, also indicated that having a strong belief in self was part of his success. Wallace arrived for an interview on Valentine's Day carrying a large bouquet of red and pink carnations which he had bought in a fundraising campaign earlier that morning. Wallace carried the flowers with him throughout the building all day, since he was afraid they would be stolen from his locker. He was determined to deliver them to his mother and grandmother that afternoon. His strong belief in confidence allowed the athlete and Student Council president to walk the corridors of the high school carrying flowers. Wallace, who was eager to express the love he felt for these important women in his life, also described how he had worked at McDonald's earlier in his high school career and had been promoted quickly to a position at the front counter since, he explained, "They spotted me for being good with the customers. I can talk with people easily."

As an African American high school student, Wallace occasionally had to deal with the stereotype of the African American male teenager. He described how some of his African American, male peers did not always appreciate his academic regimentation:

> A few of them will say "You're hittin' the books too much. Why don't you ever come out with us sometimes?" I go out on weekends but never during the week. That's a no-no in my house. I'll go out on weekends and see a movie or play pool, but not often. The guys know better. They don't come up and nag me about stuff like that. I haven't had too many problems with that. I am not an egghead jock that's

> only worried about playing ball and I am not a nerd. Wallace the student and Wallace the athlete balance each other.

Matteo enjoyed a challenge such as his campaign for the presidency of his junior class in which he defeated two of South Central High's top athletes and "a popular female" for the position. He took his campaign into every homeroom classroom and was victorious. He worked throughout the year to energize the student body and he began to tackle his next challenge with real zest. Matteo was also determined to gain acceptance into the United States Air Force Academy. As a junior, he began to pursue that dream. His strong belief in himself can also be seen in the attitude he took in applying to the Academy.

> They give you a whole breakdown. They give you a whole list of names that you acquire before you are a cadet. There are 30 million steps to the application process and all along the ladder there are people saying, "This is a big job. Are you sure you want to do this?" By the time you get there, you are probably asking yourself, "Do I really want to do this?" People want you to think it's impossible. My attitude is if you think it's impossible for me, then I want it. I hate people telling me, "You can't do this. It's impossible." My response is, "Really? Try me!"

Mandy, who vacillated between periods of achievement and underachievement, displayed an intense belief in self when she was achieving in school. This belief was partially developed because of recent experiences arranged by her school counselor. One summer program in creative writing in particular, helped her to believe in herself:

> Part of that came out too because I started writing. I started writing and learning things about myself. Now I know that I could write; that I could express myself without anybody going like "what are you talking about" or "that's stupid". I write down what I think and what I feel, and that is not stupid. That's who I am. So those are the kind of things that I learned. Anything I say, anything I do, anything I write, how I think; that's me. I shouldn't have to feel like I should hold that back. I had a very low self-esteem, not confidence in myself to do anything. "Go to college? Yeah, right! (sarcastic tone) Me, I don't think so. "Now it's I <u>can</u> make it in college!"

Mary summarized succinctly what so many participants in this study acknowledged, when she was asked what made her successful in school Mary replied, "probably believing in myself."

Personal Characteristics

A number of common personal characteristics were demonstrated by the achieving participants in this study including: motivation and inner will, positive use of problem solving, independence, realistic aspirations, heightened sensitivity to each other and the world around them, and appreciation of cultural diversity. Numerous examples of these characteristics were consistently noted in this study.

Sensitivity

The participants in this study displayed a sensitivity to situations, people, places, and the difficulties of urban life. Both males and females exhibited a heightened sensitivity about many issues. The males' belief in self appeared to involve a sentimental, intuitive, and caring quality about them, and they did not follow the traditional cultural patterns dictated by a macho society. In fact, one young man specified that his cultural background allowed him to be openly sensitive as this quality was highly valued by members of his family. Lucio,

the Cuban-American young man in the study, explained that he was raised in a Latino household, "an old-style household that's not like this society" where people openly expressed their emotions and men were comfortable showing their affection for each other. Lucio jokingly pointed out that restrictive emotionality was a problem that plagued the culture of White males. Lucio explained that his closest friends were often females, and that during the summer, he especially enjoyed the company of college-age female friends from his neighborhood who appreciated his maturity and the many hours of intense conversation they spent on serious and sensitive topics. He explained:

> I have a lot of friends in females. It's easier to talk to women. They understand and know how to express feelings a lot easier than men. I find it easier to talk to girls than talking to guys. With guys at school, you have to put on this facade. I feel more comfortable talking to girls. They don't care. They just fly off the handle. They just go with it. They express their emotions. I feel comfortable with that.

Mary, an achieving female participant in the study, was a friend of Lucio's who commented on Lucio's sensitivity. As a member of the women's swim team, Mary watched Lucio's boisterous behavior with his peers on the men's swim team every day around the pool. She explained that she was happy to know the softer, sensitive side to Lucio who had often written her poems to thank her for her friendship or having been around to listen to a problem he was facing. Mary commented, "Lucio is very deep."

Another Latino male in the group, Orlando, explained that he also appreciated the company of sensitive people. He described his arrival at a new elementary school when he moved to the city from Puerto Rico and how he had to seek new friends. He reflected back on this period by saying:

> When it came time to find friends, I usually looked for people who were like me. There were a lot of guys in that class who were big and bullyish.
> I looked for the quiet, sensitive type of person who was reserved, friendly, and easy to talk to. People that were nice. Those were the friends I chose.

Orlando commented that his sensitive qualities affected the way he selected his female friends. He explained:

> There are a lot of pretty girls out there but when I look at a girl, I look at the inside, you know—the heart—how nice she is, not just any ole' regular girl that one guy has for one week and then they break up.

Sensitivity was apparent in Rafael, as he reflected back to his early childhood in Puerto Rico and described in great detail scenes from his homeland. He was able to vividly portray his reminiscences in color, describing the landscape, aromas, and significant people from his memories of Ponce, Puerto Rico. He shared his love for writing poetry and explained that he wrote in Spanish because his native language was more precise in allowing him to describe emotions. He pointed out that he did not write poetry "about flowers and trees" but about "human turmoil." Rafael experienced great sadness over a failed relationship with a young woman during his junior year of high school and he claimed his poetry helped him to deal with the anguish he felt during the experience. He explained that poetry helped him to "clear his thoughts." In an interview with his English teacher, she noted that he was able to use his bilingualism as an asset in his writing and she encouraged him to submit his poetry for publication as she was impressed "with the sensitive quality of his work." He wrote a character sketch in another English class which earned him an A+. This piece was about his guidance counselor, Mr. Thomas. He was proud of his work and wanted to let his counselor know he had written it. When he shared it with his counselor, he

explained that Mr. Thomas read it in his presence. Rafael commented, "He didn't say anything to me but I could tell in his eyes that he liked it."

Vaughn, the senior member of the men's swim team, was appreciated by his peers for his sensitivity. His friend Mary reported that he had a reputation for watching out for the freshman members of the team for he enjoyed the role of "big brother" to the younger athletes. In his senior résumé where he listed his strengths, he wrote:

> Over the years, I've noticed my friends appreciating my understanding, willingness to listen, and trustworthiness. When it comes to talking to me about a sensitive topic, people feel very comfortable. This is the quality I am most proud of.

Sensitivity was also displayed by most of the female achievers in the study. In some cases, conversations with participants about their relationships with their families and friends revealed deep sensitivity about nuances that occurred in their lives. Nicki's continuing struggle to understand her father's alcoholism and her mother's bitterness, and her decision to write about these problems is indicative of the sensitivity exhibited by most of the females. Sensitivity in these young women was also displayed in their work in the city and school and in their service to the community. Claire explained her participation in "Take Control," an afterschool program for elementary school students in which she works for at least two hours each week. She discusses "saying no" and indicates the consequences of sexually active behavior with younger girls. She explained what she said to the elementary children, and displayed her sensitivity about children having children.

> If you decide to bring a child in the world, do you have money, do you have a job, do you know he will be there for you? It's not right for those who have kids to just give them to their mothers, or give them to their sister—whatever. Because a lot of their sisters end up raising their sister's or whoever's kid. And the child doesn't even look upon you as a mother and they call the other person Mother, and they love that person who is taking care of them. You have your whole life to have children. Don't have them while you're young. Because then, you lose a lot of the fun things you can do when you're young.

Mary's sensitivity was apparent in the many ways she helped in her community and in the school. She, like many of the other female achievers, was involved in a peer tutoring program in her high school and was committed to helping students who wanted to achieve. Toni's aspirations of the future involved business management with financial success primarily to "get her mother out of the projects." Helping friends and family members were clearly described by most female achievers as goals, a further indication of their sensitivity.

Independence

Jana, who was Puerto Rican and had participated in bilingual programs, was extremely determined to be independent. She said she did not want to be like her mother who had given birth to three children with three different fathers, two of whom she had not married. Jana said although she loved her mother, she did not want to be like her. When asked if she considered herself different she said, "Yes" and explained: "I just don't want to be like everybody else—just hanging around. I want to make something of myself."

She also said that she would not date for the same reason. Having seen many Hispanic men who want to be "in control of everything." Other Puerto Rican high achieving female students also indicated that they wanted to be different from some of the

Puerto Rican people who lived in their city. Alexa indicated that she believed the Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico were different than those she regularly observed:

> I know my mom has told me not to judge all Puerto Ricans as some of the ones here in the city. I think there is a distinction. It just depends. I know as a little kid is raised and living in them projects and his mom doesn't work and his dad doesn't work and they just don't do anything all day and they live off the government, then that little kid is going to say, "Oh, well, my parents are getting money and they don't do anything, so when I grow up, I'm not going to do anything and I'm going to get money, too." That's just how they just raise their whole family. I don't think that's right.

Alexa also said that she wanted to be different, that she had always wanted to be different and that she was committed to having a different type of life. She wanted to be a teacher; she wanted to work and she wanted to construct an independent life.

> I know a lot of the Puerto Ricans in the city are on welfare and they don't make anything of their lives. It's just like generation after generation of the same family is on welfare and they don't work. They just stay home and have babies and stuff like that, I mean it's not all families, obviously, but when I say I'm Puerto Rican, I try to make the distinction that I'm not part of that group of Puerto Ricans. That my parents both work and we have values and we're not just sitting around the house all day long doing nothing. Sometimes I'm like, "Well, I'm Puerto Rican," and I get ashamed of it sometimes.

Determination to Succeed

This determination to succeed was consistently echoed by most of the participants in this study, especially the female achievers. Marisa explained that her parents helped instill her determination to succeed:

> I want to be the best. My parents, I think instilled that in me. That has to be done when you're growing up, how you're raised. My parents always said, "You have to be the best. The best. The best." So that stayed with me and I just want to be the best.

When asked if this caused her to feel any pressure, Marisa responded:

> Depending on how much there is. You need the pressure to grow up. You need that pressure. It's a good kind of pressure, but if it gets like too much like, "You have to get this grade," or "If you don't, then you're going to get in trouble." That's going too far, but you still need that pressure.

Marisa's determination was evident in all of her actions. She was strong, outgoing, and became even more independent between her junior and senior years, breaking up with her boyfriend, caring less about her appearance, wearing less jewelry and make up, and displaying even stronger bonds with her female friends. Nicki was quite different in the way her personal characteristics were displayed. She was quiet, calm, and explained that she had periods of doubt about her own abilities which had been addressed by her close friends. Mary, in particular, would not and did not let her fail. During their years of close friendship, Mary was a constant source of support. By Nicki 's senior year, she was calm, confident, and determined. Her scholarship to a small private northeastern college had enabled her to achieve a dream, as no one else in her family had ever attended college, and Nicki was determined to go and to graduate.

> I'm not sure exactly what I want to do, but I know that eventually I'll find out what I want to do. I know that I want to go to college, and I think that I want to be a teacher. But if that changes, I won't have a problem with changing my mind. I don't have to be set in something to feel confident.

Alexa 's determination to succeed, which to her, was to be different, was echoed by Jana when asked what had encouraged her to succeed in her high school, she indicated her peer network of high achieving females. As noted previously, in addition to displaying confidence, independence, and determination, the young people who achieved in this study did not suffer from perfectionism or multipotentiality. They indicated that they knew the areas in which they were not outstanding and they accepted these dualities. Rosa explained:

> I'm good in algebra. I'm good in biology and chemistry. Physics is harder because it's like word problems. I like geometry but I'm not as like real fantastic in it, but I really like it. I like urban literature because that's like reading about the different ethnic groups and stuff, and I really like that. I'm good at that, too, but I'm not good in certain things, like physics because of the word problems is [are] harder.

Appreciation of Cultural Diversity

Participants acknowledged that appreciation for cultural diversity was an integral part of the strong belief in self they had. All of these young people mentioned the pride they had in the culturally diverse population of their high school and how their appreciation for diversity helped them become better adults. Lucio expressed his appreciation for his environment and explained how the multicultural quality of the population affected him personally.

> You have such diversity here. The girl I am going out with is from Guiana. I talk to Puerto Rican people every day. My family is from Cuba. You have African American kids here. You have Polish kids. You have all these different people. Everyone is just combined here at South Central. We just melt together. It's nice. It's something that you learn outside of your textbooks. You learn 5% in class and 95% in life. The more diversity you have, the more cultures you come in contact with, the more you learn.

He continued to describe how his experiences were different from students in a suburban setting.

> There is someone new every day. One day, I'll be talking to a Russian kid. The next day, I may talk to a Polish kid. Even if the classes aren't exciting, the people around you are. If this school were more homogeneous, like at Ashley High School, I'd go crazy. Everyone there would have the same frame of mind. It would be boring.

Matteo also compared his multicultural awareness and appreciation to other settings:

> I have a strong multicultural awareness in attending school in the city. I know Hispanic cultures, the African American culture, the Asian-American culture to my own Italian culture right here on Jefferson Avenue!. . . . I went to a dance a few nights ago with my new friend from Webster High School. There were no Hispanic people. There were no African American people. There were no Asian people. It was just White people! I was the only person in the gym who could have said this and I did, "I have never been in a room with so many White people who can't dance!" It was a real shock to me. I never realized how I take cultural diversity for

> granted. If I ever did move into a suburban setting with my future family, I think they would lose.

Tania was also appreciative of the cultural diversity in her high school, and like most of the girls, seemed to accept the diversity of the high school as part of her daily life. Explaining that her favorite book was *Black Like Me*, she said that discrimination was not an issue in her high school where diversity was natural and prejudice rarely experienced. The Puerto Rican students in this study seemed to perceive that their culture was more often negatively regarded than the African American culture. However, it should be noted that the achieving students in this study were those who tended to accept diversity and flourish in this multicultural environment.

Because the multicultural appreciation was important to these students, they listened closely to their older friends who returned from different colleges and universities in various settings. Matteo explained:

> My friend Marc is a freshman at [state university]. He came home and said, "I've never been in a place with so many White people. I can't stand it. Everywhere I go on campus, there is no diversity there. I almost want to go to NYU only because I know I will turn the corner and there will be someone with a different face, different hair color, different eye color." I think that is one of the advantages I have because I go to school every day and I see a lot of people of color, almost to the point where I don't see color any more. Logically, we'll never be able to not tell the difference between a White person and a African American person or a Hispanic person, but emotionally now, I don't see a difference.

Several students who had deep religious convictions, perceived the multicultural environment as a place where all cultures got along together rather well. A representative comment summarized the view of this group.

> Actually, I don't see a lot of people labeling others. We are pretty good. We get along pretty well. It's a school that is integrated. The African Americans, the Whites, and the Hispanics all get together. Sometimes there are put-downs. Some things come and go. Most of my fellow students here are Christians and they respect each other.

Vaughn, the swimmer, was a lifeguard at a municipal swimming pool in the city during the summer months. He was proud he used the Spanish he learned in language classes at South Central in his dealings with Hispanic children at the pool. Following his junior high school years, rather than enroll Vaughn at South Central High School, his father considered sending him to a private academy in the exclusive suburban community west of the city. Vaughn was opposed to that plan at the time. He appreciated the diversity of his high school environment, and explained how the environment affected him personally when he commented:

> I wouldn't be the person I am today had I gone to a private school. I have been exposed to so many more different kinds of people and cultures here. Private school is not the real world, but I know that I am a real people person now.

Inner Will

Each of the high achieving participants in this study referred to an internal motivation that kept them driven to succeed in their urban environment. Matteo referred to

this drive as an "inner will" and this inner will was an important aspect of the strong belief in self observed in these young men.

Another participant explained that his inner will was the result of family hardships:

> I have watched my father struggle and I know my parents want me to have a better life. I say I want more but then I feel as though this drive is almost a selfish thing. On the other hand, it's not. That's something that really drains a lot out of me.

Orlando's inner will, according to him, could be attributed to his strong religious convictions. He explained succinctly:

> I believe in the Lord. I believe that I have to put forth my part also, but there is no doubt about it. If you help yourself, God will help you. My gifts and talents come from the Lord. My success is through Jesus Christ.

Claire's inner will was obvious during all interviews. She was strong and determined and knew what she wanted as is evident when she explained that she knew in second grade that she wanted to be a doctor:

> I knew from second grade that I wanted to be a doctor. The sixth graders had a series of career speakers and I got to go to the sixth grade classroom to listen. I used to sit there in those classes and they used to say, "She is so little." I was focused on being a doctor!

Both Toni and Tania had similar religious convictions and Toni regarded church as a "strength in my life which helped me to make the right choices."

Several of the participants indicated a combination of factors which explained what constituted their motivational force. For example, Vaughn saw the ingredients of his "inner will" as a combination of "friends, hard work, and evaluation." He explained his theory:

> Most of my friends have faced problems that I haven't had to deal with—alcoholic parents, difficult home lives. I am grateful that I haven't faced those problems. That has made me appreciate what I have. Hard work is involved and I appreciate criticism or evaluation from adults. I like that a lot. It has helped my personal development.

Resilience

The majority of the high achieving participants in this study clearly revealed their resilience to overcome problems associated with their families, their school, and their environment. Most of the achievers involved in this study came from homes which had been affected by poverty, family turmoil caused by issues such as alcohol, drugs, and mental illness, and other problems. As one participant indicated, "My family story is filled with eyebrow raisers." Other achievers had relatively calm and peaceful homes. All participants, however, lived in a city that is plagued by violence, drugs, poverty, and crime. Their school district is often called one of the worst in the country and has the dubious distinction of being the only district in the country to have its Board of Education vote to consider having a private company take over some schools in the city. The consensus of the Board was that the schools could not get any worse.

The young people profiled in this study survived in the city and excelled in their school. They ignored drug dealers, they turned their backs on gangs, they avoided the crime

in their neighborhoods and they went on to become valedictorians, class presidents, star athletes, and scholars. Some went to Ivy League Schools, some attended the most selective colleges in the country and all wanted to make a contribution to their world. The courage and resilience displayed by these young people seem remarkable and yet, they simply accepted their circumstances and appreciated the opportunities given to them. Nicki's family problems might have seemed overwhelming to some young people as they included persistent family financial problems, her father's constant battle with alcoholism, her parents' divorce, her mother's bitterness, and her own alienation from her family and friends because of her constant need to achieve. Yet, instead of turning to drugs or giving up, she examined her life through her writing, winning a $10,000 scholarship from a large insurance company for an essay submitted to a writing competition.

Milton also demonstrated his resilience when he described the feelings of despair and depression he experienced when he returned to his home in the projects after having attending a special summer programs on a beautiful college campus. Though he felt overwhelmed by the poverty in the projects and the growing number of young people in his neighborhood who were "tuned out to education," he attempted to solve a small piece of the problem. He volunteered as a tutor at an elementary school near the projects where he worked with bilingual students. The sensitive young scholar from South Central High School thought he would be able to "relate to these young people who might be having trouble with their reading or learning English."

Mary, who was actively involved in numerous service organizations in high school, was committed to returning to her city after earning a degree in social work. "I have to be able to help," she explained.

Marisa, describing her high school environment, displayed an understanding of her own resilience and the resilience of her peers by discussing their high school:

> You know, there's so many distractions. School now is a fashion show or it's a brawl outside. You look out the classroom, people are fighting. It's not what I thought school would be. There's not—the proms aren't even that good. It's not really a good high school that you see on TV. Even though that's idealistic, you always want your life to be like that.

Alexa concurred, discussing the gangs and the need for future classes of students to also display resilience:

> This year is kind of different because a lot of people that are coming in; the freshman, they are really bad. They are just really bad like they are all hoodlums and (laughs) . . . and . . . they are just really bad. Last thing I know is that half of this freshman class stayed back. We had like seven hundred and fifty freshmen this year because so many of them stayed back and like. . . . I know like next year's class, the juniors now, they are only, they are the last, I think, good class that is coming out of South Central from now on I think is going to be really bad. But I like it; I like it before now; I still like it because I like it of course but am . . . but after next year is going to be really bad.

Marisa also discussed the problems in their school, her own resilience, and the need for students to develop the resilience to survive in this environment:

> We'll be in our class discussing something and then there's a fight in the hall. Everybody runs out and the teachers have to stop. You're in lunch and you see poor

> Mr. Stringer get caught in the eyes, bleeding. These kids, they're just going crazy. They're animals.

Marisa and most other participants explain how they simply removed themselves:

> No, I do not want to get involved with anybody that has to do with gangs. I may be their associate, but I stay away from that because it just brings trouble.

Matteo eloquently summarizes the resilience displayed by so many of the achieving students and the pain many of them feel despite their ability to achieve in this environment:

> You can never be prepared for it. When someone kicks you down, it hurts just as bad. I was talking to a friend yesterday who is a diabetic. He said, "You can't tell me that you can learn to deal with pain. I am diabetic. I have a fear of needles. I take a shot three times a day. That needle hurts just as bad the first time as it does today. It still hurts the same. You just learn how the pain feels and you get accustomed to it. That's why some people lose. They may be stronger people but is still hurts every time they lose. Any time you are kicked down, it still hurts."

Mary concurred, pointing out the resilience she's developed because of the prejudice she's observed.

> That's extremely upsetting that there's nothing you can even say. There's times when I can say that I feel lucky. "I'm the lucky one who goes here and who knows what it's like." I've been given a gift because I'm not prejudiced and I've been able to be friends with all kinds of people, but people don't see that from the outside. There's nothing that one person can say to stop that. But it's really sad because a lot of people on the team are Puerto Rican and they're good friends of mine. I'm White and it's a slur against them and not against me. It's really hard. I feel for them.

Crime was also an issue for all of the participants in this study and these high achieving students described problems that developed because of crimes in their neighborhoods and surrounding their high school. Jana explained about how the current problems with crimes have affected her after school activities:

> I didn't know what to do about it, so I walked home, and my mother got really upset because somebody got killed in front of South Central. I think it was near the pharmacy. I saw the police there and everything, when I was going home, but my mother got mad because I walked home. She told me I had to quit managing the basketball team unless I got a ride home.

Some, but not all of the students, have encountered negative feedback from relatives or friends because they are perceived as working too hard in school and some students have parents and relatives who tell them they're crazy to work in school. Jana explained:

> Yes. I have an uncle who says, "Why are you wasting your time?" He tells me, "Why don't you just get a job and forget about school."

These difficulties and challenges result in students who have developed resilience and the ability to be independent and to fend for themselves. Marisa explained:

> It's up to the student. The student has to go out and look for scholarships. They have to look for the programs to get into. The teacher, they'll say, "There's a workshop on English or there's this seminar." The student has to go and be the one.

> They have to put the step forward and go into it because the teacher can't say, "You have to go," if the student doesn't want to. They have to show the initiative that they want to go.

Alexa also explained the need to be resilient if a student cared and wanted to achieve in school.

> If you care about school and you do your work and you show you are interested in succeeding they would support you and they would do whatever they can to help you. If you don't care or you don't try at all they are gonna . . . it's not that they are not going to support you but they aren't gonna have as much interest in you.

Support Systems

Various networks existed to support the achievement of these students including peers who also were high achieving students, family members, supportive teachers in previous years, and other adults.

Network for High Achieving Students

It became clear very early in the study that a support system was created within the school to help the participants in this study succeed academically. This support system consisted of the students who wanted to succeed academically and were willing and able to work to achieve this goal, and various teachers, coaches, counselors, and administrators. This network was absolutely essential to the academic success of most of the achieving participants in this study and all participants acknowledged its existence in variety of ways. As students became older, the network became stronger as various extracurricular involvement occurred or intensified. These extracurricular activities included clubs, organizations like the National Honor Society, and experiences such as summer programs at private schools, Upward Bound, special ceremonies at various universities. The network supported the experiences. For example, the guidance counselors began to realize which students had the ability and desire to succeed academically and provided the opportunities to students who had the greatest likelihood of succeeding. It was at this point in their high school experience that the greatest gap emerged between high ability students who achieve and underachieve. When interviewed, some of the counselors in this study were shocked to learn of the high scores of the underachieving students who were also involved in the study. Because of the large student load assigned to each guidance counselor, counselors usually indicated that they had to spend the majority of their time dealing with students with problems. It was a common occurrence to see police and drug enforcement officials, social workers, angry parents, and community members in the guidance counselors' offices. So much time was spent on this population and so little success achieved that some guidance counselors indicated that they considered the encouragement of high achieving students both a responsibility and one of the few successes they experienced in their work. One guidance counselor, upon hearing of Rosa's acceptance and full scholarship to Brown University, hugged one of the researchers involved in the study and said, "This is the joy of my work!" This sentiment was also expressed in interviews with other teachers and administrators believed that achieving students received "the short end of the stick" because so much time and attention had been and continued to be spent on students with academic, social, emotional, and behavioral problems.

The network of achievement also included the peers of achieving students who worked together on projects, community issues, in honors classes, and who provided support and encouragement to each other in numerous ways. All participants in this study were committed to supporting their peers and friends. Two of the female achievers who

were among the first to be interviewed for possible participation in this study, for example, approached researchers with a request that they meet with and consider for inclusion in the sample, friends who had been achievers in the past but were currently in danger of underachieving in school because of family problems. The participants provided an active network for each other, for friends, and intervened when problems arose at home or in school, providing help, peer counseling, and the support needed to overcome the problems.

Family Support

Most of the participants in this study appeared to have supportive families that nurtured them in a variety of ways. Some participants had extremely supportive families while other participant's families provided minimal emotional support because of their need to strive for economic survival. It was interesting to find that all subjects perceived that their parents regarded school and learning as very important as a way to improve their situation in life, but that in almost every case, the parents of these young people had minimal involvement in their high school experience. They rarely, if ever, came to the school and were not active in school activities or projects. Participants in this study cited numerous examples of how their parents were actively involved in elementary school, but as students entered their secondary school years, parental involvement diminished. Parents would occasionally ask, "Did you finish your homework?" However, little attention was paid to either the content or process of learning by these parents.

The participants in the study acknowledged and described the emotional support they received from their families, despite their families relatively minimal involvement in school. Matteo's family lived in an apartment house and his grandparents lived below them and an uncle's family lived above. Matteo's grandfather spent much time at Matteo's family's kitchen table reminiscing about the old days in Sicily and passing on advice to his son and grandson. Matteo described the relationship between his father and his uncles as very close. "When one brother moves, they all move." Matteo's father was dealing with an expected layoff from the manufacturer for which he worked and the family support systems appeared strong as the entire family prepared for the unemployment. This supportive family feeling was apparent in Matteo's discussion of a family conversation regarding his father's situation. He said:

> The family was talking about it last night. Dad was saying we are one of the lucky families. We own the house. My grandparents paid off the house. Everything is paid for. We don't have to worry about a place to live. That worry is gone. My grandparents wouldn't mind if Dad couldn't pay the rent as he does now. The same is true for my aunt and uncle. They will forgo the rent money so we can have a place to live. That's a consoling thing.

The hardships faced by Matteo's family brought him closer to his parents as evidenced in his discussion of the family's lack of financial resources. He said, "I had the money built up from my birthday. I gave it to my parents to put into the family budget because at the time it was getting pretty low."

Matteo regarded his father as a creative role model. The man who created blueprints for unusual furniture encouraged his son to watch over his shoulder as he designed his creations at the family computer. Several of these creations were included in the family's collection of living room and kitchen furniture. Matteo's father hoped to sell his blueprints for profit in the future. Another father and son business venture being planned for the expected period of unemployment was a company called "Banners, Etc." Matteo and his father planned on designing signs, banners, and calendars to sell to small businesses. They planned on designing their

products on their home computer and making a fortune. Matteo explained, "This project has been sitting in mothballs. As soon as the company pulls the plug on my father, we'll go for it!"

Matteo discussed his mother's childhood in a family that faced problems he referred to as "eyebrow raisers" and compared the differences in support he and his sister received when he explained, "There are no conditions on the love we receive from our parents."

The strong belief in family support was also noted in the experiences of Rafael whose parents brought their seven children from Puerto Rico to the United States for a better life. This love of family provided him with the motivation he needed to meet his challenges at South Central. He explained:

> I realized the burden my parents had taken. I knew the roots of where I was coming from. I realized that they had made so many sacrifices for me. It has been so many years. Just to give up now would be such a disappointment, not just to me, but to my mother. . . . I found encouragement from their situation, where they came from, where they were born. They were born in the countryside. They were very poor. I got the motivation from that. Knowing how they struggled and the sacrifices they made. Now I get upset because my brothers and sisters don't seem to take that into account. Lately, I have had a lot of discussions with my parents and I realize the sacrifices they made.

Lucio, whose mother and stepfather emigrated from Cuba, also referred to the hardships his parents faced and how much he appreciated all they had done for him. He said:

> They help me a lot. They came over with so little and then gave us all the time and so many opportunities. It's because of them that I try and get good grades. I see my father working 60-70 hours a week and I see him killing himself. My mother comes home exhausted. I look at them. They try so hard for me and my younger brother. I do owe them a lot. . . . This encouragement has always been there. They accomplished so much knowing so little. Just imagine what I can do knowing so much.

As Lucio was interviewed, his mother approached him at the kitchen table and jokingly discussed the length of his hair. She lovingly teased him about its condition and offered to cut it stylishly. She explained she could live with his rather long hair, but admonished, "Wear an earring, and you lose an ear!" Lucio's extended family was also very important to him. He was awed by the struggles they faced in Cuba under the Castro regime and shared details of their hardships. Members of his extended family were visiting from Havana and as one aunt passed by she planted a loud kiss on his cheek. He explained:

> When they arrived, she had just been in the house a few minutes and she started to tell me to cut my hair. For someone to show me love, you have to bother the hell out of me. That's why I love her so much.

Claire also indicated the consistent support she received from her parents:

> My mother would say, "You be a doctor, and you be the best doctor that you can be." . . . And by seventh or eighth grade, she knew I was serious. And when I told my father "I want to be a doctor," he said, "What kind of doctor?" I said, "I don't know." I watch a lot of Bill Cosby, and I want to work with babies, so I want to

> work with babies so bad. I want to be a pediatrician. My father said, "Oh, you'll be a good pediatrician." I got support with my father. We would sit down and we'd talk about my career and everything. My mother already invested money, she bought me some encyclopedias. These books have everything!

This love of a supportive family was also described by Orlando whose parents had emigrated from Puerto Rico when his father was in search of employment as a teacher. Teachers' salaries in Puerto Rico were low so Orlando's family came to the United States for better economic and educational opportunities for their eight children. The family's religious strength provided them with support in a variety of ways. When Orlando explained that his family was contemplating whether they could afford a family trip to Florida to visit relatives, he said:

> We seek the Lord first so His will be done. The Lord usually gives us a sign to let us know that it will be all right to go. For example, when we were praying to see if we should go to Florida, we prayed for financial help. All of a sudden, Dad got his tax return. That was a good sign.

> Orlando's tightly knit family practiced their religion together. Orlando explained that his parents wanted their children to appreciate their cultural background and the family had prayed so that he and his older brother could travel back to Puerto Rico for a summer visit.

The older brother Orlando referred to was the same brother he was delighted to have had in his chemistry class at South Central High School. Diego was the valedictorian of his senior class, and rather than compete, the two brothers studied together every night. When Orlando conducted the daily morning prayer meeting at South Central High School in the North Commons of the cafeteria, his brother Diego stood to his right in the prayer circle. When Orlando told his family that he was torn over his indecisiveness about his plans after high school, his family responded, "Seek the Lord through prayer and He will help you."

Alexa also indicated that her parents' support was critical to her success and cited example after example of ways in which her family supported her and encouraged her success without nagging her or producing a stressful environment:

> It's probably my parents or something because I know they really care about how I'm doing in school. If I'm not doing good they'll, you know, they'll tell me and they'll be like we'll help you if you need any help and you know you have to do good or you're not going to succeed. I guess that's probably it and because I want to be I think that I want to succeed and I don't want to be on welfare like a lot of people or something.

When asked about the various ways in which her parents encouraged her, she indicated:

> Yes. Yes, I do homework that takes up a lot of my time. My parents are always saying, "I hope you do good in school," and stuff, but usually not that they don't care but they already know that we have good grades and stuff so when I bring home my report card I can get straight A^{+}s and they won't be like surprised or anything, but if I get an F then I'll get in trouble.

When asked if homework was left up to her or in which ways her parents were involved with her academic work, Alexa responded:

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> Well, mine is left up to me. Like if I get home and I'm not doing anything and I'm just sitting watching television, my mother will say, "Don't you have any homework?" But like my little sisters, my parents, as soon as they get home they say, "Change out of your clothes and go do your homework."

Wallace also described a supportive family who helped him believe in himself. Wallace and his younger brother had a mother, father, and grandmother who monitored their academic and athletic progress. He described his father's support:

> When he goes to work, he takes our report cards. He shows them to the guys at work. When I see his friends, they know who I am before I even meet them. Mom and Dad are proud. They do the same with my brother.

Wallace explained that he and his brother received support from their parents through a system of academic discipline. When discussing homework, he described the following family scenario:

> They make sure we are doing it. No TV. We are sitting at the table doing everything that has to be done. You do what you have to do and there are no phone calls during that time. When the phone rings, it's "No, he can't talk right now." I have my own line and my Mom takes the ringer and cuts the ringer off until I finish everything. Or sometimes, she keeps the ringer on, and she'll tell them I'll call them back when I am finished everything.

Wallace received a similar message from his maternal grandmother who called him and his brother daily and admonished, "Stay in shape, stay cool, and keep hitting the books." He also pointed out that his grandmother took savings from her small salary as a nurse's aide and rewarded his brother and him for impressive grades on their report cards. Their grandmother also collected newspaper clippings from *The Centerfield Gazette* each time her grandsons were mentioned on the sports page and brought them to her job to show her co-workers.

Toni and Tania's mother was a source of constant support, positive influence, and encouragement. They believed their mother displayed courage and inner will and were both determined to make their mother proud of them.

Supportive Adults

All of the participants in this study indicated that the guidance of supportive adults were essential to their academic success. They all cited teachers at the elementary or junior high school level who had been influential in their school lives and who had an impact upon their current success. Matteo commented on an influential first grade teacher and the powerful impact she had on him. He explained:

> Mrs. Scarfa was my first grade teacher. My parents have told me I loved her. She gave me one theory that I still walk around with and I think it's my major driving force. When people tell me that things are impossible, there is no such thing as "can't." That word is not in the English dictionary. Mrs. Scarfa told me you can do anything and everything you want just as long as you have the drive and the power to do it. That's one thing I still carry around. Nothing stops me from doing what I want. There is no "can't."

Matteo also was grateful for the support he received from his sixth grade teacher who helped him following his unsuccessful experience with the gifted and talented self-contained class. Matteo described this teacher's support:

> It was a rough year. I was transferred out of the gifted and talented class to a regular class. Mr. Mosely knew the caliber of my abilities. Mr. Mosely knew that I could do it and he helped me get organized. He helped with a lot of organizational things—an assignment pad, zero every day without one, a journal, all of these things were out in the open. I found that I flourished under him. Maybe it was because he allowed me to step back and grow a little bit, not academically, but maturity-wise. He wanted me to come up to his expectations. He wouldn't stoop down to our level. He did this with all his students. To this day, everyone who goes back to visit him thanks him and ends up loving him.

Mary, Marisa, and Rosa all described their involvement in an elementary enrichment (gifted and talented) program in which they had the same enrichment teacher for several years. They especially remembered the opportunity to do projects and to pursue self-selected interests. The teacher in that program was described as "encouraging me to go farther" and as "someone who really believed in me."

Several participants reflected on their fifth and sixth grade teacher in the bilingual program who inspired them. They described their teacher as a "role model" who enjoyed his students and appreciated the hardships they faced in the projects. After working with this teacher, three were mainstreamed into a regular junior high program.

Other participants also had an inspirational teacher who helped them to believe in themselves. One teacher was described by two participants:

> My sixth grade teacher. I had moved to the new school. I was really intimidated by her on the first day of school. She talked really loud and screamed but she was a teacher that advised us to always do our best, to strive for the best. She was one of the first teachers who got me to think that I could do things, that I could be a really good student.

Lucio had an art teacher who helped him strengthen his belief in himself when he was undergoing some personal troubles at home. He explained how she made a difference:

> My art teacher was there for me. She saw talent and wanted to nurture it but even more so, she really took a liking to me and she talked to me like a friend. I like to see teachers as people and she did that.

Supportive Adults at South Central High School

Along with supportive elementary and middle school teachers who inspired many of the young achievers were teachers or other adults at South Central High School who continued to provide support and helped to strengthen their strong belief in self. An interesting finding in the study was that better teachers who were mentioned by the students were described as people who cared and helped. Very few of the teachers who were mentioned were noted for curricular reasons. The participants appreciated teachers who challenged them intellectually, yet the majority of the teachers discussed were regarded as supportive adults who nurtured their belief in self, their motivation, and their overall well-being as young adults.

Orlando described his Urban Literature teacher as someone who cared about young people. He said:

> He's an excellent teacher. He has patience. He is encouraging. He lets you know through constructive criticism what you are doing wrong and he guides you.

Wallace described his idea of teachers who made a difference versus those he did not appreciate. He said:

> Teachers who help and understand make a difference. Not teachers who sit there and give you busy work and say, "Do as I say." Those teachers who don't really talk to you are those I don't respect. I understand they have busy lives and they have work to do, but some teachers just stick to the book and don't even look at you.

Vaughn supported Wallace's feelings about teachers who simply presented the content and who "stuck to the book." He claimed he appreciated people-oriented teachers. He commented:

> Mr. Bosco is never down. He's always in a good mood. He understands you. If you don't get an assignment done on time, it's no big deal. "Get it in tomorrow." He's kinda' laid back but he treats you like an adult. I appreciate teachers who treat students like human beings. Teachers who just teach out of the book, I mean, I can just buy the book and stay home and read it!

Participants agreed that teachers who care about students as people were more effective in reaching their students. One student said:

> Some teachers will take the initiative to start talking to students about the football game on Saturday or something like that, and with those teachers, you feel more comfortable. It's a teacher, yeah, but you feel more comfortable around that person who talks to you like an adult. There's not an ominous feeling around them.

Vaughn agreed, and explained that teachers who were supportive were those who were seen as genuine and who treated their students as people. Vaughn explained:

> Mrs. Lowell in freshman English treated you on a personal basis. For some reason, she was the only teacher I ever liked doing assignments for. The only teacher ever! She didn't make you do this one book. She let you read whichever book you wanted. She let us have choice. That's what made her class fun. It was based on our interests, not someone else's.

Mrs. Lowell, the freshman English teacher, was mentioned by more students interviewed in the study than any other faculty member at South Central High School. Throughout their descriptions of the woman and her style of teaching were signs that the woman was reaching out to these young men in such a way that they knew she cared about them. One participant described her class:

> Mrs. Lowell taught with a lot of enthusiasm. She told us on the first day of class that we were never leaving the room. "This is not a democracy!" she said. "Whatever you need from the nurse, I have right here. You gotta' get sick, there is the trash can. You want a drink of water. I have bottled water." She *had* bottled water! "People come in from the rain some days and your hair is all wet, I have a blow dryer." She really did and she let people use it. She had people keep their

> jackets in her teacher's closet. She was a real good teacher. I loved her from the first day. It was a really good class. She was my best teacher. She was at every football game. You know who your true fans are. When you are winning, everybody is there, but when you are losing, only your real fans are there. She was there at every game. I connected with her from the start.

Matteo found support in a close relationship with a science teacher he had worked with for several years. He described their relationship:

> Mr. Will has been my CPEP (Pre-Engineering Program) advisor for three years. I had him for biology. He knows me almost as well as I know myself. We think alike. He's really helped me in a lot of things. He hates how I work. He says, "Matteo, index cards work well. I will buy you a pack." He hates my lack of organization. I always do well. In his eyes, I do good work. A lot of teachers who have dealt with me have told me I don't give enough time to my work. All of them have said that if I spent more time on my work I would end up with a better product. That's where Mr. Will comes in. He nags me about that constantly. "Matteo, you need to develop that further, this point. You need to spend some more time with this. You need to put more meat into it." With this science fair project, he is sitting down with me at the computer and we are going through the paper and we are composing it together. He will ask, "What are you trying to say here?" Basically, he's helping me re-write the paper so it's state finals quality.

Matteo joined forces with Wallace and a female student in their physics class and the three young scientists competed in the state science fair with their project on cold fusion. The rather sophisticated topic caused some anxiety for several science department teachers, yet these students were happy to report they had found an advocate in their physics teacher.

> Mr. Proctor was the only one supporting the idea. With the platinum and other elements we needed, Mr. Willis and Mr. Jenkes didn't want anything to do with it. These metals are so expensive. They knew there was no way we could get the money for that. We talked to Mr. Proctor and he said he would sign for the metals. We found a company in Bloomfield that deals in precious metals that agreed to let Mr. Proctor sign for them. We have to bring the metals back in April. Mr. P. said he'd be responsible.

Several participants mentioned their guidance counselor as someone who had been personally supportive of them in a variety of ways. Rosa, for example, mentioned that her guidance counselor, who was also Hispanic, encouraged her in part because she was Hispanic.

> My guidance counselor is Hispanic himself, so he's like, "I want you to do good for us. I want you to do good for the Hispanic community." I say, "All right, I will."

Marisa agreed, indicating that her counselor had:

> . . . been like a father figure to me. I can always run to him when I have problems or anything. I can tell him everything.

Rafael had several teachers who spoke highly of his work yet he found his most supportive relationship with his guidance counselor, Mr. Thomas. Rafael's counselor apparently had helped him through difficult times as Rafael described a time when he was dealing with the ending of a serious relationship he had with a young woman. He had

difficulty dealing with his hurt and his counselor had been very supportive. He described Mr. Thomas:

> He's a regular person. He attempts to understand you, to comfort you, to provide you with advice and he listens.

He went on to describe how supportive Mr. Thomas had been during his very painful experience.

> Last year when he helped me with my problems, he really saw what I was going through. He listened and provided me with support. Sometimes he would come to my home and talk. He was there for me. I was having a lot of problems with my parents, too. I couldn't turn to them. They were too upset with the situation I was going through. It was like living in constant torment living in that house. Even my friend Diego told me I was just living, but not really living. I was losing weight. I couldn't sleep. I don't like to even think about it. Mr. Thomas was there for me through that whole year.

Mr. Thomas was one of the busiest guidance counselors at South Central High School. Observing him in action every day involved watching a constant line of students who were waiting outside his office door. Inside his office were typically two or three students enjoying animated conversation with him or a private conference behind a closed door. His office walls and office door were covered with snapshots, photographs, and newspaper clippings of students at South Central High School. The popular counselor was a support system for many young people. Throughout the study, many students explained that they went to Mr. Thomas for advice after having seen their own guidance counselor. They explained they did not want to offend their own counselor but they trusted Mr. Thomas's counsel. His reputation as a caring, trustworthy counselor who worked very hard for his students was described by a majority of students in the study.

Claire also spoke of the profound belief her guidance counselor has had on her:

> My guidance counselor—that woman adores me! She tells me: "You are honor material." And I'm like, "But Miss. It's hard." And she's like, "No, no, no, no. You have to do it. You have to do it. You must do it. You're one of the leaders in the school. You have to do it." And so you get a lot of pressure to have to do things, and so if I don't—one day I just decide not to do my homework, everyone would look at me like I was crazy. Especially in biology or something. The teacher would say, "You didn't do that? I'm very disappointed in you." And so, I do it!

Claire began taking additional honors classes because of the encouragement of her guidance counselors, and during her sophomore and junior year, enrolled in three honors classes each year!

Most of the participants in the study were comfortable reaching out to the administration at South Central High for support when necessary, and many of the females indicated that they were consistently motivated and inspired by the female principal of the school. This principal was always looking for opportunities to encourage the young women in the school regardless of whether students were achieving, failing, or somewhere in between. On one occasion, for example, she brought three senior girls to an awards assembly for women at which she was to receive an award for outstanding service and contributions by the major state university. Explaining, she indicated: "Maybe one of them will become inspired to contribute in some way."

Coach Brogan and the Boys' Swim Team

Wallace's positive feelings about his experiences on the football team were representative of many of the athletes in the study. A large percentage of the high ability young people who achieved at South Central High School were supported by a particular coach who was recognized throughout the building by faculty members, administrators, counselors, and students as a man who shaped a group of swimmers to become achievers both athletically and academically. The swim team was a sub-culture within the South Central High School culture, and its coach had been successful for many years in building a support system for several generations of bright, young athletes.

Vaughn and Lucio were two of the six male swimmers nominated by guidance counselors for participation in the study. All the swimmers were interviewed regarding their experiences on the team. Similar findings were reported about the impact of coaches by both male and female participants in this study. The descriptions provided below by Vaughn and Lucio are representative of the comments made by members of the team. Their relationship with their coach was an important finding in the study, therefore the coach's perceptions of the high ability young men are also included.

Vaughn expressed his admiration for Coach Brogan very early in his first interview. It was readily apparent that the swim team was the focal point of his high school experience and his relationship with the coach was something highly valued by this bright young man. He said:

> He's a very ethical man. Everyone has a lot of respect for him. When he talks, we listen. There are certain rules on the team like keeping your grades up to remain eligible to swim, such as no drinking during the season. Everybody on the team sticks by these rules. To lose his respect would be pretty bad.

Vaughn had been swimming for Coach Brogan for four years and mutual respect between the coach and this senior member of the team was evident. Vaughn had been recommended by the coach for a part-time job during the school day in which he helped assist the special education staff with students with disabilities during their swimming lessons. Coach Brogan selected only the most trustworthy member of the team for such an important responsibility.

Throughout the conversations with Vaughn, Lucio and the other South Central High swimmers, there were constant references made to a "family" down by the pool. When Coach Brogan was questioned about this feeling of "family" on his team, he smiled quietly, got up from behind the desk in his tiny office, walked into the lavatory and came out holding a mug filled with toothbrushes used by the swimmers every morning. He smiled again and made no comment. Throughout the interview, members of the team arrived in the office and grabbed their brown bag lunches from a tiny refrigerator positioned next to an overstuffed sofa where they relaxed.

This feeling of a supportive family was described by Lucio when he said:

> He's more like a father figure to us. He is a father figure to a lot of us. If something goes wrong, he'll talk to us about a lot of things, like the gang stuff that's going on around here. He doesn't want to see us make major mistakes. He takes the time to listen and tries to understand. If there is an individual personal problem, he'll talk to the swimmer individually. With things in general that are going on in school, we'll all sit together and he'll talk to all of us.

When asked about his role as a father figure, Coach Brogan replied:

> In some cases, I may be. A lot of our kids come from broken homes. There is no father around, and I suppose I fill that role a bit. If it happens, it's something that happens. I enjoy it. I don't back away from it.

A parent of one of the team members became teary-eyed when discussing Coach Brogan and his effect on these bright young men. She said:

> He really cares about the kids. There's love there and it works both ways. There needs to be a place for these gifted kids. His swimmers know where they can find him. With Coach Brogan, they can always find him by the pool. . . . This relationship is so important to these kids, especially in a big city high school like this one. Otherwise, they get lost.

Vaughn explained that Coach Brogan had high academic expectations for his swimmers and had created a system of maintaining academic support for the young men on the team. He said:

> On report card day, he won't let you into the pool until he has seen your card. Basically he knows what everyone has received for grades because I think he goes to the data room to check on us. He's looking for trouble spots. He wants to know if you are asking for help. He doesn't mind if you take time out of practice to get extra help. He sends around a notice at the beginning of the season to see if teachers are having problems with any of the swimmers.

Coach Brogan explained his philosophy of academic support. He said:

> I have a private conference with each kid, to see how things are going and to remind them of their responsibilities. I taught history for five years before I took over down here. Whenever I see a lousy grade in history, I get livid because they know that they can come to me and we can talk about whatever problems they are having. I try to get tutors among the team to help others out with courses that I don't have expertise in. They have to maintain a C average but when you get a group like that, it's not uncool to talk about homework and make sure things are getting done. They get on each other's cases making sure that things get done. They know that the first priority is grades. I stress it all the time.

A similar situation existed for females in the study who had a different coach. Mary described her coach and the relationships that she encouraged:

> Swim team, for some reason—I don't understand it—they're all honors kids. I mean it. There's really no relation there, but they're all. Both of our coaches push very highly for, "Go home and do your homework," and that's important. That's very important. Most of the people on the swim team are either honors or academics. Those are probably my best friends and then I have a lot of others just from classes and a few from softball.

Participation in Special Programs, Extracurricular Activities, and Summer Enrichment Programs

Both male and female participants in this study were involved these activities that were held both during and usually, after school hours. Almost all of the achieving students in this study remained in their high school after school to participate in a wide variety of

activities on a daily basis. Many of the participants were involved in more than one sport and all were involved in numerous school clubs and activities, including jazz band, foreign language clubs, service groups, and academic competitions.

Matteo enjoyed hiking and running early in the morning as preparation for the physical exam he hoped he would take one day for entrance into the U.S. Air Force Academy. He had competed on the high school's tennis and cross country teams. Rafael enjoyed baseball and basketball in his neighborhood and was taking karate lessons and working out with weights.

All of the high ability achievers were athletic in their own right, and were also involved in a variety of activities both after school and in the summer. These special programs and extracurricular activities also appeared to have an impact on their achievement and the development of their intention to achieve academically.

> In addition to competing in three varsity sports, Wallace was president of the student council, a reporter for the "Student Page" in *The Centerfield Gazette*, and served as class president during his freshman year. Wallace was spotted for high potential as a seventh grader and had been nominated for the High Tops Program. This program provided junior high school students with a series of field trips and seminars with professional architects and city planners who were involved with the design and construction of several modern high rise buildings in the city. The students were provided with exciting tangible experiences in math and science through this program designed to raise the aspirations of high potential inner city youth considered "at-risk."

Rosa was also involved in another intervention program for inner city youth with high potential, the Upper Bound Program. In this program, Rosa attended a six-week residential summer program at a nearby small liberal arts college in the city. The purpose of the program was to strengthen academic skills, provide tutorials throughout high school, provide counseling, assist students with the college application process, and provide support throughout their four years of college.

Wallace who attended the same program, described it as another positive aspect of his high school experiences that kept him very busy. He said:

> It helps me a lot. While you are on campus in the summer, it's intense work all the time. Two and a half hour study halls at night. It's a lot of fun. You take classes that you'll be taking during the year, like your English classes. There is a mandatory composition class. You have science and math. Whichever course you'll take in the fall, you'll be one step ahead of everyone else. You don't get credit for these courses. If you fail a class during the year, then you can take it with Upward Bound at a local private college, but the work is harder. Some people I know who graduated from the program said it was more work than they experienced in college! . . . There is a support system all through high school. Tutors, SAT prep courses. They watch you closely. They make sure people send in their grades to see how they are doing in classes and see if they need help. They help you select colleges too. They have a college tour every month.

Mary, who was involved in three sports and countless extracurricular activities discussed some of her plans for **one** semester as an officer in National Honor Society:

> So far we did a food drive and a mitten and hat drive. This Thursday we're going to have a pizza party for the home room that donated the most. So that's really

> exciting. We're doing an Encouragement Tree, where we send out certificates to like anyone in the school that gets nominated. It could be janitors, or anybody for improvement or a good job. We're going to start like a community breakfast for the school where we invite leaders to come and speak.

All of the female achievers who were eligible (because of age) were involved in the National Honor Society. All were active in the community programs that NHS sponsored. Rafael benefited from special programs in the summer months. The young man from the housing projects was recommended by his guidance counselor, Mr. Thomas, for two experiences at exclusive private school summer programs where he studied French, Algebra II, and English composition. He came away from the exposure to those settings and the high caliber of students involved with a different attitude about education. He described his experiences:

> I met people from all over the world. It was the most exciting thing that has ever happened to me. Through the people I had the opportunity to meet, I realized the world isn't just the city. The world is much bigger than it seems from here. I met people from Switzerland, Japan. . . . I had a chance to meet a young man whose father was the president of the Gillette Corporation; another was the son of a Communist leader in Vietnam. I met all sorts of people from all walks of life. When I came back, I told Mr. Thomas that I was interested in going to some private school like that. He showed me brochures of other schools. I liked the private school experience because your friends became a family. You lived together and went to classes together and had fun. It was so much different from here. I was surprised with the dorm monitor who wrote in my recommendation that I fulfilled a role as a leader in the dorm. I think I was setting an example for some of them, the way I acted, I guess. I acted a little more mature.

Some of the students activities revolved around their religious lifestyle. As president of the Bible Study Club, Orlando organized a number of activities for the South Central High student body. He explained:

> In the first year of the club, we had speakers from different churches come and speak to the group. We had all kinds of religions represented, but basically we focused on the Bible. Another year, we went to churches once a month as a group and we ministered there. In May, during the National Day of Prayer, we took advantage of that and used the auditorium to bring in speakers. We had songs, scripture readings, and prayer for the nation, the school, our families, and teachers.

Orlando and three of the female achievers put their religious convictions to work through extensive involvement in Christian philanthropy projects in the Centerfield community. Through the Christian youth groups he was associated with, he visited convalescent homes and organized students to volunteer at drug rehabilitation centers and soup kitchens. He did volunteer work with the Salvation Army. He worked as a tutor and on weekends he was busy preparing religious worship services with his church's youth group as well as volunteering with the Habitat for Humanity project. The Habitat for Humanity project provided him with interesting experiences. He explained:

> I was interested in the Habitat for Humanity work because I had some experience at home with construction work with my father. I helped build a home on Tower Avenue. I helped with the sheet rocking. A lot of people were there. It was the middle of the winter and I was surprised at the number of people who showed up, old and young people. We started out with a prayer. It was nice. It was so cold that day, they served hot chocolate. The house went up really quickly. I remember

> one time we put up some sheet rock and we forgot to cut a hole for an electrical outlet. We really learned from our mistakes! There were experienced carpenters and electricians. You worked with them and you learned from them so the job was done well.

Orlando's many hours of volunteer work were recognized by the city community and he was one of three teenagers awarded the 1992 YMCA/United Technologies Youth Citizenship Award. A full page from *The Centerfield Gazette* describing the award and Orlando's involvement hung on the door of Mr. Thomas's office.

Matteo, the lively class politician, was extremely active. The résumé he prepared for his guidance counselor's file was constantly being updated by Matteo who was determined to get into the U.S. Air Force Academy. He was actively involved in Junior Achievement, student council, National Honor Society, the high school band, and a number of enrichment programs held during the academic year and in summer. In each activity, he took on leadership roles. With a strong interest in engineering and science, he became involved in CPEP—the Pre-Engineering Program and served on a statewide executive board called [State] Association of Educational Opportunity Programs which oversaw collaboration of programs such as Upward Bound and CPEP. Along with the training in applied math and science through CPEP, he attended the Young Scholars Program, sponsored by the Project to Increase Mastery of Math and Science (PIMMS), an enrichment summer program for students from the inner city communities. Through PIMMS, he enjoyed a five week summer camp experience at a private university where he enjoyed dormitory life, interaction with "Ph.D.-types," and the mentorship of older college students who were majoring in applied sciences. During a second summer, he was involved in the STAR Program, another math and science enrichment opportunity held at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. He was also involved in Business Week, a five-day course in business administration at the University of Centerfield.

Tania's activities are representative of all of the female achievers in this study. She was involved in basketball, softball, and volleyball. She had participated in the state's pre-engineering program at a local university, a program for talented students who were at risk due to economic hardships. She was class president and an active member of Common Ground which she explained:

> It puts the suburbs and inner city schools together to discuss stereotypes about the city schools and the suburbs, and try to fight the racism that is out there. It's finding a common ground—it teaches people about ways they are alike and how to be a leader. But, I already know how to be a leader. I became involved in Common Ground because I thought I could make a difference, since I know about racism.

Tania was also active in a church and planned to attend a six week academically challenging summer program at a private school in her state to which she had received a full scholarship.

Appropriately Challenging Classes

Another major factor that students attributed to their successful academic achievement was their involvement in honors classes. When they entered their high school as freshmen, they were assigned to honors classes because of their previous high grades and their level of hard work. The counselors created one or two honors classes in each academic content area and students who were high achievers could enroll in the class. Students who were involved in this study were consistently grateful for the opportunity to take these classes and be grouped with other students who wanted to be involved in the

classes and who wanted to work and to learn. After the seniors who were in this study completed their sophomore year, a vice principal, who was committed to detracking the school, convinced the school administration to open up the honors classes to anyone who wanted to take them. Most of the achieving students in this study voiced their beliefs about the importance of honors classes and their ambivalence about the changes they had encountered with the change in policy. Alexa explained:

> With respect to not having honors/academic classes, mixed. I don't think that would work. I mean . . . our vice principal here used to talk about that. How he liked that because you would have the honor stu' nts helping the remedial. I don't like that idea only because I think we'd go back to the elementary days where the classes cater to the lower people and everybody else just kind of sits there. I personally wouldn't like that because I feel like I wouldn't be getting anywhere.

Nicki, for example, indicated that her freshman year classes were more challenging than were subsequent years when honors classes were opened to anyone who wanted to register for them.

> Freshman year it was really challenging because I had a very strict and tough biology teacher. She really worked us hard. I think that was my hardest class ever, because I was always studying, and always doing work sheets, and stuff. My English teacher was tough, too. And that was really good because I think it's better to prepare students for freshman year to work hard.

Mary concurred, indicating that her honors classes had become much easier after they had been opened to anyone who wanted to enroll.

> Easy. I can say this year was a lot easier than other years. I think Pre-calculus is the only class that's close to hard. I mean that is hard, I'll say that, but most of the other classes, they're either—In English classes there's honors and academic or there are honors juniors in there. It's not the same. I mean, sophomore and junior year were somewhat challenging, but the classes are not this year.

Mary discussed her feelings about the way students were grouped:

> I don't know. It's just this year that I'm frustrated with the classes and I just don't have a lot of patience with it this year. It could be because the academic and general classes are so big that for the kids that are on the border, they're more willing to push them up into honors classes—I mean that could work for them, but I don't think it works for the other kids.

Several of the students also indicated that students who fail courses demand and receive the additional attention of many teachers. Marisa explained:

> There's so many students and so many cutbacks and so many teachers have to deal with students who are failing the course. They have to do so much to get them to pass, so they won't have to be repeating the year, that they really can't go into each individual and just work on a talent in that person.

Participants in this study consistently indicated that honors classes provided students who wanted to achieve, the opportunity to be in classes together, and to be able to work at a level that was challenging, or at least more challenging than another class might have been. These classes also enabled high achieving students to work in an environment in which teachers and other students could concentrate on academics and doing one's best.

Other students did not make fun of them, discourage their achievement, or impede their learning in these classes. Without these classes, these young achievers believed they would not have learned at the same level, the same depth, or the same pace.

The participants worried about the trend to allow anyone who wanted to take the honors classes to be able to do so, and worried even more about a rumor that heterogeneous group would be used in all classes. Many believed that high achieving students should be able to have separate classes. Marisa explained:

> Yes, so it would be better if we do have separate classes for gifted students, so people can excel, even at their own level, as long as they're not held back by other students who don't understand the material.

Realistic Aspirations

The aspirations of the young people who achieved at South Central High were closely tied to their strong belief in self. They all expressed a desire to graduate from college and pursue a professional career, with a clear sense of what they wanted to do in life. They had dreams and definite goals towards which they were striving, and these dreams, goals, and career aspirations were closely connected with who they were as people. Their personalities were often reflected in their choices for the future. Gender differences emerged relative to the aspirations of the achievers in this study. All of the young women in the study wanted to enter "helping" careers, usually considered "female" professions such as teaching, social work, or nursing. Rosa and Claire wanted to be doctors.

Claire dreamily envisioned her future life of living in upstate New York, New Jersey, or in the South. A house and a husband emerged in the picture. Claire added that she wished to have a family that would include, not only her own natural children, but teenagers who were unwanted and needed loving homes. "Everybody only wants to adopt cute babies." She would have a pediatrics center which would provide service to poor children. "I'll be the head," she declared.

All of the other female achievers mentioned careers generally dominated by females. Mary explained:

> I came to South Central High and I think the biggest problem is the social problems that are here. You have teenage pregnancy, you know, people that may do drugs or parents that are alcoholic and single parent families, and all that kind of stuff. I made close friends who . . . practically everybody has one of those problems.

Gender differences emerged relative to the aspirations of the achievers in this study as all of the young women in the study wanted to enter "helping" careers. The constant problems surrounding these young women on a daily basis may have had an impact on their aspirations and career choices.

Rafael, the sensitive young Puerto Rican student who overcame economic hardships and was proud of his bilingual background, wanted to pursue a double major in early childhood education and elementary education to be able to teach elementary bilingual students. He thought he would serve as a strong role model for many other young Hispanic children who may feel disenchanted with the educational system.

Wallace knew that athletic scholarships may become a possibility if college recruiters continued to attend South Central High's football games, yet he was not depending strictly on athletics to determine his life goals. He commented, "I am definitely

going to college." He was considering Clemson University and Texas A&M as possible first and second choices for college. The personable young man who served as student council president and had the respect of his peers, considered public relations or law as possible career paths. He had watched one other African American athlete from his high school accept a scholarship to an African American college the previous year and the experience had not been positive. He expressed concern about this, explaining that the young man had "messed up in high school classes" and "he had to settle for what he settled for." The older athlete was now back in the state attending a community college and Wallace knew that he wanted more than his friend was willing to accept. His strong belief in self apparently enabled him to realize higher goals than his friend from the previous year.

Orlando, the Bible Study Club president, explained that he had to deal with ambiguity over his career choice for awhile, but through prayer, he hoped to find an answer to his question. He said:

> I was really interested in engineering. That would have been my first choice. But when I started to look with my spiritual eyes, I saw a need for people to know Christ as their savior. There is a need for people to know they don't have to be bound by drugs and alcohol. There is a way out. They can change their lives.

Orlando knew that he wanted to pursue a career in youth ministry, yet he was unsure how he would support a family, another goal in his life plan. He commented:

> I need to pray more so I can see with my spiritual eyes. I want to follow His will. I see myself working with youth. I don't see a wage or anything to support a family. I want to have a family. I have to pray a lot. It's hard for me. If I am going to be a minister, a preacher, I am going to start off not making a lot of money to raise a family. I need to seek the Lord's will.

Though he had not focused on a definite college major, Lucio knew he had another year to consider the issue and he believed he would pursue postsecondary education in liberal arts. He went on to say:

> I want to get my education, to travel, to work. There are so many things I want to do. I do want to be well traveled. It's something I love to do. I don't want to go to tourist meccas. I like to go to places to escape. Travel is important to me. I see myself going overseas a lot. I want to see places that are rich in history where you can still get away. I want to be happy basically. Happy and comfortable. Happy is being with someone that I love and want to spend all my time with. Being comfortable is not being rich, not being poor, just somewhere in the middle.

Matteo believed in himself and he had definite career aspirations. He spoke of the U. S. Air Force Academy throughout all of his interviews, and his plans for a college degree through the military appeared to be consuming a large part of his life. Matteo decided he wanted a degree in civil engineering combined with environmental science and because of his family's economic hardships, he decided to gain his college education through the military. He described the Air Force Academy as a "ticket" to his dreams, yet he didn't necessarily see himself pursuing a career with the military. He explained his plans in his unique style:

> The military is the way I will get to my goal. The question is whether I will keep the car. I will have been enjoying the joy ride for all it's worth, but I am not sure if I will be staying with the Air Force. That's what will have gotten me the engineering degree. It's kinda' like staying on the bus after New York and deciding whether you

will continue on to Baltimore. [Laughs] I may make a career out of it. I might hate it. I don't know. I'll see down the road.

Matteo had a backup plan in case he did not get accepted to the Academy. He would apply to prestigious engineering programs such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and hope for substantial college scholarships granted to high achievers from inner city environments. His father emphasized the backup plan since he did not want to see Matteo put all of "his eggs in one basket" and be disappointed should he not be accepted to the Academy. Matteo listened closely to his father, yet he presented him with a rigid daily schedule he had designed to organize a new regimen for himself. This daily schedule involved getting up at 5:30 a.m. to run and lift weights to get in better physical shape for the Academy!

The High Ability Underachievers

The following section of the chapter is a discussion of the core categories which emerged across cultures from the high ability underachievers in this study. These categories include school factors, family issues, community factors, and personal factors which affect underachievement; each is explained in a separate section below. Differences between cultural groups related to underachievement are discussed in Chapter 7 as are the experiences of female students which differed in some ways from the male underachievers.

School Factors

The high ability underachievers in the study consistently indicated that they had experienced a high school program which was quite different than the one described by the achieving population. The six major factors which were found to influence the academic achievement of these high ability young students are: inappropriate early curricular experiences, absence of opportunities to develop appropriate school work habits, negative interactions with teachers, absence of challenge in high school, and questionable counseling experiences.

Inappropriate Early Curricular Experiences in Elementary School

Underachieving students believed that their elementary and middle school experiences had been too easy, which had a direct impact on their later school experiences. The young people who were not successful faced daily curricular experiences which were inappropriate for them. The elementary academic experiences of the participants who underachieved in school played a dramatic role in the emergence and development of their underachievement in high school. Most of the high ability underachievers believed that their elementary school academic experiences were not challenging enough. Their classes and academic tasks were often "too easy," and participants recalled "breezing" through elementary school so that their achievement required no major effort for these students. School work was so simple that students did not acquire appropriate opportunities to develop important academic skills or sophisticated study skills. Both students' school work habits and self-discipline, in their classrooms and at home, were not properly developed, according to the data gathered in this study. Teachers provided students with regular curricular experiences and educational pacing within the regular classroom that seemed to inhibit students' development of their high abilities. Some students did not have early access to appropriate educational services within the regular classroom or in gifted programs. Some students had limited access to challenging learning experiences that foster the skills and discipline required for higher intellectual pursuits later in their academic life. These circumstances were not purposely created to keep students from reaching their

highest level of potential; however, this seemed to be the effect of their schooling experiences. Participants were slowed down by their educational system as documented by Milton, Marwin, and Sandra's experiences.

Milton clearly remembered his years in elementary school, and remembered that his grammar school teachers loved him because he used "to pay attention and listen in class." For instance, his first grade teacher wrote that Milton was an excellent and highly motivated student, and his third grade teacher wrote: "excellent math and reading skills, does his work in complete and efficient manner, a very cooperative child." However, in fourth grade, Milton began to display unusually talkative behavior and, by fifth grade, his teacher claimed that Milton was "not putting enough effort into his work" and that he needed to "work on self-control." Teachers did not recognize that these behaviors may have been signs of his dissatisfaction and growing boredom in the classroom.

Milton was identified as a gifted student when he was a fourth grader, but no services were provided either in his classroom or in a gifted program. In fact, no evidence exists of any efforts in school to support Milton's high abilities. It was not until seventh grade that Milton was placed in a Classical Magnet Program in which he later refused to participate because of his feelings of isolation from friends. When asked about his academic experiences in elementary school and his current academic performance, Milton, with some bitterness, explained:

> It was so easy! I went to school [in grades] one through eight, and everything was easy. And I hit ninth grade, and then everything got hard. Everything got difficult. I was used to the easy, and I don't want to change. I want classes to be easy for me.

Sandra, a senior, remembered that at one time, she and her classmates had to do ten compound words, and she ended up doing a hundred and ten. She indicated that during elementary school she used to go well beyond her assigned work and tasks leading her to experience difficulties with peers, explaining: "that's why everybody hated me in school." On her student records, her teachers consistently noted her tendency to "rush through her work," "complete classwork sometimes too fast," and "finish work too quickly" since third grade. This tendency to work quickly on her classwork led her to experience problems with teachers. For example, teachers sometimes complained of her careless written work, her difficulty remaining in her seat, and talking in class. It is evident that teachers did not fully understand her abilities. For instance, her third grade teacher indicated that Sandra was a "bright girl" who was "very careless in her written work." Sandra explains:

> I had problems with my teacher because she said I did my work too fast; so my work was all messy, but I did it. My point was "I did the work, that's it. I don't care if it is messy."

By fifth grade, Sandra was identified as a gifted student with above average intelligence, leadership ability, and creativity; and was nominated to be accelerated in reading and math. As a result, she was placed in a gifted and talented resource program which she attended five periods a week. Sandra remembered "I had to do all of this extra work and read all of these extra books" but she "didn't care" at that time because she felt special and was proud to be part of the gifted and talented program. However, her participation in the program did not continue, since her fifth grade teacher claimed that it was interfering with her social studies work. Consequently, her chance to experience more challenging and appropriate learning experiences were threatened. Sandra expanded on this matter: "I can't forget this experience. Oh, my gosh! I felt so bad. . . . I got a D on one little test, one test, and she took me out of the program. I was so mad!" Sandra summarized her experiences

at the elementary level with an enthusiasm that changed as soon as she remembered her situation in high school:

> Oh, yes! I remember elementary school. I liked it (smiles). It was so easy! Everything was so easy maybe because I look at it now that I am in high school. I remember that the work was easy though. Reading was so easy. I mean, I would take those MAT tests and would always bring back "phs-post high school, post high, post high school." I was like the top one in my class. I had so many good grades, [pause] but that was in elementary, though.

Marwin, a ninth grader at South Central High School, reported attending four elementary schools. He explained that his parents kept moving because they were looking for jobs or just because they wanted to get out of the neighborhood which had become a bad area. Regarding his elementary school years, Marwin said that "everything was all right," "cool" and "kind of fun" until fifth grade. Marwin was identified as a gifted student in fifth grade, and at the same time, his teacher noticed the visible onset of his underachievement: "[Marwin] has ability but lacks good work habits, staying on task and completing work. He is easily distracted from work. [He] lacks motivation." Marwin started receiving services from the gifted and talented program when he was in fifth grade, however, his student record does not provide further information. The type of services provided are not clear, but it seems that his behavioral problems masked his high abilities when his academic records were reviewed. His sixth grade teacher recognized his high potential but addressed Marwin's willingness to "work well [only] when he puts his mind to it." This teacher also complained about Marwin's inclination to be "very disruptive" in class. Marwin reported that after sixth grade, he did not receive special services because the new school did not have a program for gifted and talented students. Another aspect of Marwin's inappropriate early schooling related to his study skills and academic performance. He maintained that he always got As and Bs on his report cards, although he only studied during classes. Martin's comments were representative of the majority of the underachieving students in this study:

> Elementary school was fun. I always got As and Bs on my report cards [pause]. I ain't never studied [laughs]. I studied when we were in class. For example, when we were doing work, and correcting it. That's it. I never really had to study at home.

Absence of Opportunities to Develop Appropriate Work Habits

During upper elementary, middle, and high school, participants who underachieved started facing new situations that required different or more efficient study skills. Consequently, opportunities to acquire new study skills and/or to improve students' school work habits were necessary. Unfortunately, participants did not receive direct assistance in this respect. These young people reported that no opportunities to develop or to improve their work habits and self-discipline were provided in their school experiences. They believed that the schools and/or teachers assumed that work habits were already developed, and that it was, therefore, not the schools' or teachers' responsibility to provide students with opportunities to develop their working habits.

Participants reported that their middle and high school experiences were troublesome and also believed that their academic experiences during elementary school were insufficient to prepare them for the later academic challenges of middle and high school. In middle school, some school work began to be more complex and competitive; sometimes, it was only unchallenging "busy work." However, students were asked to be more productive and to become more involved in the learning process. Several students

explained this situation by echoing the same phrases: "It was harder. I used to get Cs. I got lazy. There was more competition. I was mad. I didn't like it."

Participants who were underachieving in school tried to manage the challenge of their middle and high school academic experiences by making an effort to work harder and to persevere. For example, as mentioned before, Milton was placed in a Classical Magnet Program during seventh and eighth grade. Although his high abilities were not properly nurtured during his early schooling years, he was able to meet the new demands in the gifted program including courses such as grammar/philosophy/logic, Latin, astronomy/anatomy, and advanced mathematics. Unfortunately, the lack of appropriate attention to Milton's emotional and social needs as an adolescent gifted student influenced his academic performance. By the end of eighth grade, while attending the gifted program, Milton started displaying explicit behavioral manifestations of his underachievement such as poor attendance, inconsistent homework, and disruptive behavior in class.

During middle school, participants encountered new situations that required more efficient study skills. According to the perceptions of these young people, no opportunities to develop or improve their school work habits and discipline were provided by their middle and high school experiences. They believed that their teachers assumed that work habits were already developed, and that it was not the schools' and/or teachers' responsibility to provide students with opportunities to enhance their working habits. In a heated tone of voice, Rose Marie complained about her experience:

> I would like to know how to study. They never taught me in school. They expected us to do it by ourselves. It wasn't going to happen. I mean, you don't expect a baby to start walking straight up without learning to crawl, you know?

Participants who underachieved worked harder and displayed some persistence in order to achieve during their secondary school years. However, when the students' efforts and perseverance did not lead them to experience success, they began to devalue their own efforts and abilities. As a result, the likelihood of underachievement intensified. An example of this occurred in Milton's biology course. Milton's biology teacher explained that Milton was a "very verbal, enthusiastic, and articulate student" at the beginning of the year, but by the end of the first marking period, he had started to lose his homework and to hold back in class participation. He was "turned off" but on occasions appeared to be the "old student." In this class, Milton had been seen to be more productive and to exert more effort in his academic tasks. He made an effort, but stopped persevering when he experienced failure despite his efforts to work harder. In order to avoid feeling like a failure, he decided to stop trying. His academic and self image were lowered, as Milton explained when he discussed this experience in his biology class:

> I got sick of it. I got tired of it. I got tired of her giving me all that work. She said she gave you enough time, but it still was a lot of work. And I had other classes to do work in, and she didn't really think about that. All she cared was about her class period. So I got sick of it. I never did her work. Every time she gave me a paper, I would put it in my notebook and never look at it. And I told her I wanted to leave her class and my counselor said she couldn't change the class, so I had to stay in there for a whole other semester. I wasted a whole semester. There was no other class to put me in. So I said "I'm not going to do my work." I used to try hard. She'd give me fifty-sevens and sixties on worksheets, and on tests I'd score low sixties. And I was thinking, "I'm working my butt off for a D." Why should I bust my behind, working in a class, just to earn a D or a credit. So I got tired of it. She was too rough.

Negative Interaction with Teachers

Teachers became critical sources of support for the students' learning in high school, and if teachers were not considered to be caring and concerned, underachievement was exacerbated. Participants who underachieved believed that although they met "good" teachers during their secondary school experiences, most of their content area teachers were less caring and supportive than those they encountered during elementary school.

Participants who underachieved in school described "good" teachers as caring individuals who know how to teach and make classes interesting. Participants believed a caring, sensitive teacher possessed the following traits and qualities: related personally to the students and was accessible; gave attention, understanding, and encouragement; "looked over" his/her students; made students feel comfortable; and enjoyed interactions with his/her students. "Good" teachers were also characterized by their ability to balance hard work and fun in class, and their availability for academic as well as personal help. Marwin's comments on "good" and "bad" teachers were representative of many students who underachieved in this study. Marwin defined fun as "anything that I am happy doing" and provided an example of a teacher that he believes knows how to keep a balance between work and fun:

> Mr. B, he's a fun teacher. We're doing Shakespeare now, and poems. It's fun because-we get to talk, we get to discuss topics. He talks to us. He makes us laugh. The assignments are fun, like we write about ourselves, about other people, about things like growing up. In other classes, you can't really get into it because it's just work, work, work, all day. In that class, you can go up to the board, and write stuff down, like what we think. Now we're doing peer counseling. It goes by real quick.

In addition, students reported that Mr. B was able to get involved with his students. He played tennis with them during the springtime and if students had a problem, "he'll try to help [them] in any way he can," according to Marwin. On the other hand, participants perceived that uncaring teachers and teachers who do not know how to teach effectively have a negative impact on them. These teachers were described as being unable to establish a satisfactory level of rapport and empathy with the students; they were also unable to provide challenging and enjoyable teaching-learning experiences. This type of teacher utilized inflexible instructional methods which discouraged students' interest and involvement in class. The conflict between teachers' personalities, teaching styles, and students' personalities and learning styles appeared to be irreconcilable for the underachievers in this study. In some cases, the mismatches between teachers and students resulted in implicit and explicit manifestations of dissatisfaction by both teachers and students. Some teachers became openly or surreptitiously offensive, and some students displayed disruptive behaviors within the classroom or became passively rebellious. This situation is further entangled by rigid administrative and disciplinary rules that exacerbate students' sense of helplessness.

Rose Marie had superior ability in mathematics, but she was currently failing her honors geometry class. In the mathematical section of the state Mastery Test taken in eighth grade, Rose Marie scored at the highest levels on conceptual understandings, computational skills, and problem solving and applications. However, difficulties were evident when dealing with measurement and geometry. In addition to a limited background in geometry, Rose Marie claimed that her math teacher's style aggravated her problems. Her math teacher focused on rote memorization. "It's pretty much, how are you going to memorize numbers? That's pretty much what it is. It's memorizing numbers. I don't even look at it. I have no interest [in this]." Her math teacher's style did not support her high ability or needs in mathematics, influencing negatively her motivation to work for this class.

Rose Marie has decided to underachieve passively by "just sitting there" and doing no work at all. She explained:

> I hate it. I do not like the teacher at all. At the beginning of the year, we had Mr. M and he was okay. Then he left; he just disappeared or something; and we had substitutes for two weeks, and then we got Mr. E for a couple of weeks. Then, finally, Mr. L came in, and that guy is like—he doesn't know how to teach. He just doesn't. Get a new job, you know? He would stand in front of the table, he would go through the problems in the book. Sometimes, he won't even go through them. I just don't like his method of teaching. For a time there, I didn't even pay attention to him. I didn't do my homework or anything. It's pointless to study for math. I have no interest. So that really is like giving up. I'd rather teach myself. My math is sort of leaving.

Sandra was interested in pursuing a career in pediatrics so she decided to enroll in an optional honors biology course. She was highly motivated to take the course, but her experiences in the classroom and her negative feelings about the teacher's personality discouraged her. Apathy towards the class and the teacher became evident. Although she tried to drop this optional course, the administration would not allow her to do it. Sandra described her experience as follows:

> I don't have to pass. . . . I just took it because I wanted to take it. My attitude right now is "Oh, well, I will just take it over in college and maybe I'll do better with it there." That's what I'm hoping. I think I will. I'm trying. So far I got two Fs. I'm doing so crappy. . . . [I'm] failing the class because I am bored to death and just not interested and the work is kind of hard. It is like everything up together. I look at it and it is like another language to me. So, I just don't do the work. I just put it aside. I tried to drop the class but they wouldn't let me because they said it was too late or whatever. It's like I forget how to do things, like "no se me queda nada," like it doesn't stay in my head or whatever, but he bores me. If something bores me, I just don't get interested in the class and I just . . . so I got an F in that class. A little encouragement will help but nothing [is given], I need feedback. If he is not interested in me and my work that's the way I am going to be to him. too. I'm not going to do my work. He is just nothing, nobody important to me.

Marwin also expressed his disappointment with some of his teachers' styles and insulting attitudes towards the students. He enjoys cooperative work and open class discussions, but dislikes lectures which he considers "real boring." Marwin's account of his geology class and teacher exemplifies three major schooling-related issues which evolved from the participants in this study. Each of these three issues, inflexible instructional style, negative attitude toward students, and rigid administrative decisions, fostered underachievement. Marwin discussed his unsuccessful experience in a geology class:

> He doesn't do nothing. We don't even have books in that class. He makes us watch movies all the time. I mean, movies are good to watch but it's like we are not learning nothing. The movies he plays have nothing to do with the subject that's supposed to be taught. Like now, it's astronomy and meteorology, and he plays movies on animals. We never take a test on the movies. I could see, like, if we took notes on the movie, and then we studied them, and we had a little test or something. But we never do. He gives us dittos, and we watch a movie while we look at the dittos. It's hard to do it. It's hard to concentrate when you want to watch and you've got to do your work, too. When it comes to these tests that are ten pages long, we don't know nothing about them. [It] is hard to pass that class even though we don't do nothing. I tried to get out but they said that they couldn't get me out. This is the

> class that I used to cut a lot. He thought I wasn't even there anymore 'cause I used never to show up. Every single time [that] I showed up, he kicked me out or something. He kicks me out for nothing, just because I be [was] a second late. He kicks me out and there would be other people coming in after me and he wouldn't kick them out. One time I heard some students [saying] that he said, right after I got out, he said "The only reason I kick him out is because I don't like him." So, I just never go to that class. There is no way I can pass that class 'cause he is always kicking me out.

Marwin also talked about negative encounters with Ms. Jones, who was described as a "mean" health teacher. Incompatible teaching-learning styles and the teacher's offensive attitude combined with Marwin's unwillingness to conform and his "quick temper" brought about hostile interactions and experiences which were far from being instrumental to the appropriate development of Marwin's abilities. Marwin explained his view of Ms. Jones:

> I don't like her. I'm sorry, but she's strict. She's real strict. We can't do nothing in the class. We can't talk at all. We can't work together. She gives us a super lot of work. And then we don't even do tests or nothing on it. One time, I wasn't even chewing gum, and she came up to me and yelled at me. She told me to throw my gum away, and then I got suspended. I got inside suspension because I yelled at her. Because she thought I had gum, and she just insisted that I had gum, and I didn't have it. She's just not a fun teacher.

He further commented that he had already developed an attitude about these two teachers. He perceived them as having an unnecessarily rude attitude, and he explained, "If there's an attitude that I have about a teacher, it's their own fault because they are always at my back." He wished that teachers would leave him alone and let him do his work: "They just get on my nerves too much. If they get me mad, I start acting bad. If the teacher doesn't insult me, I'll be very active in class. I'll answer questions and get into it."

Absence of Challenge in High School

All of the underachievers reported that they also began underachieving if an unrewarding, unchallenging curriculum provoked boredom in their classes. Milton reported being bored in his art class. As a result, he chose to "do nothing" in class except "mess around" and "talk to other guys." Milton also mentioned being bored in his math class, and explained "I don't do no work. I just sit in his classroom, and have conversations, and laugh. I don't pay attention."

Morgan's experience with the curriculum was not positive either. Morgan was unchallenged in several classes in which his strength areas were not nurtured appropriately. Morgan had not learned to work hard in elementary school and this problem had become a serious issue. He said:

> I never did homework in elementary school. It's seriously a bad habit now. I sit down and I have my book open, and after ten minutes, I cannot sit down and do it. I don't know why. I was always this way, but it was no big deal in elementary school. Now it's become a problem.

He went on to describe his philosophy of homework and how he felt some of his curriculum could be streamlined:

> You see, the teachers I like are those who don't put too much emphasis on homework. I have a philosophy on homework. If I know how to do it, why bother

> to do the homework? It's when you don't know how to do the work that you should have to sit down and try to figure it out. If I have mastered the skill, why do I have to continue to prove that I know it by doing more.

Morgan was described by one teacher as "brilliant." He had figured out earlier that something was wrong with his educational program, pointing this out when he discussed his elementary school and junior high experiences:

> It was a waste of time. Elementary school and junior high, everything that you learn before and the whole first half of the year is doing what you already knew and you end up doing it again.

Morgan was also well known for his creative writing. He said his writing ability had been nurtured in elementary school, and the gifted and talented program had provided him opportunities for writing. He was known as a creative thinker whose writing reflected a vivid imagination, and his older sister reported that Morgan spent time writing poetry for his new girlfriend in the evenings. A student teacher from the state university reported his poetry was the caliber of a college student's work. The young poet had entered city-wide writing contests with his poetry and for this reason he complained about his English class in which he was earning a C-. He said:

> We had to do a dialectic notebook. You read the book and you take passages and you write on them, I hate doing those. I hate having to stop and write. I would rather just read the book. You see, that's important. You should do that! But now that I have a habit of not doing homework, it's almost impossible for me to sit down and do it.

Morgan explained that if he did not respect teachers, he could not become motivated to work for them. Morgan faced these issues daily and claimed he survived in school because of his association with Coach Brogan and his swimmers. He respected this man and felt the coach was his strongest supporter as he said, "Coach Brogan certainly helps you develop your talent."

> Conversations with Skip provided evidence that he was a bright yet confused young man who appeared to be lost at South Central High School and had also encountered several negative curricular experiences. Skip had asked for more hands-on learning experiences. He was not a student who learned through reading. He lost his copy of *Antigone* for his English class and planned to buy a replacement copy. Though he had not read a word of the book, he was able to provide a detailed rendition of the plot. Skip explained he learned by listening well in class.

Skip's performance during the second and third marking period of the year was miserable. He blamed his drastic slump on the time of year for he only succeeded academically during the marking periods when he needed to be concerned about eligibility for the football team. He blamed the problem on the negative environment, a peer group that had lured him into mischievous behavior, and his lack of organization. He even provided a personal theory regarding his motivation. He explained his "new notebook theory":

> I know if I went across the street to the pharmacy and bought a new notebook, I would start fresh again. There is something about a new notebook that gets me all psyched. I get all psyched up when it's the start of the new school year. I even write neater when the notebook is new. It works for me. It might sound crazy but it's little things like that make a difference for me.

Marwin also indicated that some of his classes were "real easy" and that he did not "take them seriously." He discussed first his civics class and then his Spanish class:

> It's a really easy class to pass. Every night he'll probably give an assignment for a ditto or a page out of a book. Multiple choice or something. And it's just like, the answers are in the back of the chapter, so it's an easy class to pass. But I passed it with a D last marking period. I didn't do nothing. Spanish is not really hard. It's kind of a boring class. I fall asleep in there a lot. It's like, when you're there, the class goes by about five hours at a time [laughs]. It's almost like you're in there a whole day. That's how boring it is. You just keep on doing papers and papers. You can't do nothing in that class. Just sit there and do work.

Ivy concurred with Morgan's comments explaining that if classes and/or teachers were too easy, she would not take them or if she had to enroll in them, she would "coast." She also indicated that if she didn't like her teachers, she wouldn't work, and that she rarely had to work.

In terms of school opportunities for talent development, the high school administrators indicated that they were proud of their school's efforts to encourage achievement among their student population. However, the students who underachieved in this study did not perceive that their high school was providing them with adequate opportunities for talent development. For example, they indicated that no gifted program or other services were being provided. Sandra's comments, which were representative of most of the group, provided insight about this issue as she articulated this problem:

> They can't challenge your talents because they group you in classes with people who have lower grades than you and so that slows down the class. People might be like that's not right that you isolate the higher students and put them all in . . . even when there are classes like honors classes, they sometimes put honors, academics, and general people in the same class so the teacher has to teach certain things. That's not right because it slows the people who are faster. It slows us down. If not, the teacher would be like, "Oh, since you are faster, you guys can work on your own" but sometimes we can't do that. They might be hoping that general students will advance, but what about us? What they are doing is putting us back, so this school has that problem that they just group us all together and then like when it comes up to it, more attention is put upon the general and not enough attention is put on us. This school doesn't provide [for talent development].

Other underachieving participants also believed that an obvious mismatch existed between their curricular strengths and the classes they were enrolled in; and that their special talents or strengths often were ignored.

Questionable Counseling Experiences

Inappropriate counseling experiences existed for the underachieving students as evidenced by their strengths being overlooked, their negative curricular experiences, and the problems they faced with their guidance counselors. These counseling experiences often thwarted students' path to success. The majority of the students who underachieved expressed dissatisfaction with the nature of some of their interactions with their counselors.

John loved to work with his hands and his talents were nurtured for the first time in junior high school when he enrolled in an industrial arts class. His grades in that class were straight As. Because he learned with his hands, he was happy being employed at the health club repairing equipment. As a senior in high school, John explained that the auto tech

classes at South Central were what brought him to school. His relationship with his auto tech teacher, "Mr. G," was important to him. He explained that "Mr. G" operated an automotive garage business at home and he would allow his students to bring their cars to his place on weekends to get their work done under his guidance. John admired Mr. G who provided him with new hands-on expertise and experience every day. John had struggled to get into Mr. G's classes at South Central. He expressed his frustration with the school system for the guidance he received,

> This is the second year with "Mr. G" as a teacher. I wanted to have him earlier but I couldn't. I wanted it in my sophomore year. In my freshman year, my classes were filled. In my sophomore year, the classes were really crowded. The only period I was able to take it, the classes were filled. There were other periods free, but they were unable to change my schedule around.

John's experiences with counseling at South Central were also negative. He explained that he had failed U.S. History and had to repeat the course. Class schedules were completed in September by his guidance counselor and Mrs. D'Agostino, the principal, who assisted the counselors due to an understaffed department.

John, who learned by hands-on experiences, found these classes almost comical. He believed that he had received inappropriate advice in selecting his courses because the work was too easy. He described another course that was unchallenging for him, but he was not concerned since he often was close to falling asleep after having functioned all day on three hours of sleep. He said:

> Yesterday, I took a quiz in Geometry. I thought I failed it miserably. Lately, I have been too tired in class. This is period 8. It's hard to pay attention by that time. I took this quiz and I didn't know what I was doing. I guessed. She gave me my paper back and she said, "You got the highest grade in the class. Obviously, you have been misplaced. You should be in an honors class." Everybody in there is failing and I have a B average. Everyone else is paying attention and taking notes and I never do. It's actually 12:20 by the time the class starts. I sit at the back of the room and nod off.

Benton, the artist, was recognized as a behavior problem as a young boy. When his mother pulled him from a regular classroom setting and enrolled him in a middle school magnet program which focused on the fine arts, Benton flourished. Miss Bothmer, his art teacher recognized him as a "young boy who thought like an artist." She said of him:

> He would sit at the various art centers I had around the room and draw for hours. He used to love to take his time. He loved to draw cartoons. He drew a series of cartoons of all the teachers in the building. They were very good. Not obnoxious at all. They were very clever. He loved to draw fantasy-like characters and super-heroes too. He was a very complex young boy. He could think in such an abstract fashion.

The art teacher compiled a collection of his art work for his mother to submit to the magnet arts program across the city. Benton spent his seventh grade year in this program which offered clusters of mini-courses in a variety of topics in art. Students had art every day along with their core subjects and were able to pursue art in greater depth. After a very positive experience in the magnet program, the school district transferred Benton back to his former elementary school. He explained,

> Because I was out of my district, I had to go back to my old school. They made a big fuss. They said that since I was out of district, I should go to North Central High when I graduated from eighth grade so I could attend the magnet arts program at North Central. I don't even live close to North Central. I am in the South Central district.

When Benton was asked what his mother's reaction to his situation was when he was transferred, he said that his mother simply wanted him to appreciate the year he had experienced in the middle school magnet program and continue to try his best in Miss Bothmer's classroom. When he arrived at South Central High School, he was not enrolled in any art classes.

> By the time I was in ninth grade, my counselor didn't know I had been in magnet arts. I think she knows now. In ninth grade, I had two math courses. Pre-Algebra and a new math course called Math Statistics. When I came here I didn't know that you had to ask for art. I thought that since art had been part of my elementary school classes, I'd have it in high school too. So I figured that if I didn't get it in my freshman year, I'd get it in my sophomore year. She didn't tell me. My counselor didn't offer it to me until my junior year. I had my sketches with me one day when I was in her office talking to her. She saw them and asked me if I wanted to take art. I told her I did!

During his junior year, Benton started the art program with Mr. Perrine who found his work to be "phenomenal." The art teacher commented, "This young man could be doing murals someday!" The first assignment in the course was done with incredible detail, however, within a short period, Benton began to receive incompletes on all of his work. Benton felt frustrated with the short amount of time he had to complete his work in the art room.

Benton's performance in the Art 1 course with Mr. Perrine was inconsistent. He was barely maintaining a grade of C since so many assignments were not completed on time. The teacher commented that surrealism seemed to motivate the young artist to work again, pointing out that Benton seemed immature at times. The experienced art teacher had noticed over the years that immature males in his art room who faced problems at home often escaped into a "fantasy" world through his surrealism assignment. He explained that he was treating Benton with "kid gloves" since he had noted his tendency to become explosive when he was frustrated with his work. He knew Benton was having difficulty at home with his stepfather and he wondered if he resented his art teacher as another male authority figure. He suggested transferring Benton to a female colleague's art room on an experimental basis. When this possibility was discussed with his counselor, she pulled his file as she explained that she did not know if Benton had been scheduled in the female teacher's art room in the past.

The boredom with the unchallenging and repetitious curriculum Morgan had experienced in elementary and middle school became a problem for him in high school when he had to deal with his counselor. Morgan was frustrated with having wasted a year in Algebra I when he could have handled an accelerated math program. He was told he would have to double up on math courses in order to be able to enroll in a Trigonometry course he and his parents wanted him to take at a nearby college.

Morgan felt discouraged by this since the special request would mean having to deal with his counselor, Mr. Kelly, a man for whom he had no respect. He described the situation with his counselor:

> As for scheduling my math courses, I'll start out going to Mr. Kelly, but I know I'll end up going to Mr. Thomas eventually. My parents hate Kelly. They know that he doesn't do anything. I think he is going to retire soon. My sister has him too and she goes to see Ms. Hancock. Mr. Kelly has been a family issue.

Skip's experience with his guidance counselor was also negative. This counselor's lack of awareness of Skip's situation was evident when the counselor commented, "I wish we had picked up on his father being back in the picture sooner. We might have been able to intervene." Skip's father had been back for over a year. In another conversation, the counselor commented, "I think he's still involved in football. That should help." The young linebacker had just missed being voted to the state's All-Conference football team by one vote. It was readily apparent that Skip's counselor was unaware of several important factors in his life. His counselor finally said, "Skip needs someone to listen to him. He's lonely. He's a sad kid." The counselor had a university graduate student who served as an intern in the guidance department monitor his situation. She, too, was seeing little improvement and was frustrated. In one interview, Skip summarized his feelings about the situation with those who had attempted to help.

> The counselors are the only ones here who try to understand. My counselor tries, but he's always giving me advice. I wouldn't go to him with a problem. Nobody ever touches home with me. Just you. You're the first person. Nobody can understand. I don't even understand myself. I guess it's just stages I am going through.

Chico also claimed he only saw his counselor, Ms. Hancock, when he needed schedule changes. When he did see her, it was usually to complain about a class he wanted to drop. She had suggested enrolling in a new course called "Tech Prep." He followed her advice, thinking it would be a class filled with work on machinery. Of this experience he said:

> I got my report card. I got an F in Tech Prep. It's studying machines. It's hard to understand. We study metals, alloys, and the properties of metals. Simple machines. Crazy stuff. It's not interesting. That's why I don't like it. The teachers are all right, but it's mostly book work. We complain to the teacher that we don't have enough hands-on stuff to do. We are going to start measuring soon. Measuring with chronometers. [laughs]

Ms. Hancock explained that Chico's strength was math. His Algebra teacher agreed and attempted to get Chico to join the school's math team. He laughed at the idea. The young man with math achievement scores in the 99th percentile was not enrolled in honors level courses. In October, his math exam and quiz average was 100. His homework average was 54 and he received a grade of zero for not keeping a notebook, a requirement in the course. He explained the notebook was a collection of assignments copied from the chalkboard. He explained that although he sat in the first row of the classroom, he could not see the board. He had tried contact lenses in junior high school but they made his eyes appear red and watery. When this happened, his mother accused him of smoking marijuana. Eyeglasses were something he did not want to consider, so instead, he squinted and did not turn in a math notebook.

Family Issues

A second participant category which emerged from the data was a series of family issues that negatively affected the lives of the high ability underachievers. The family issues include: family dysfunction, strained relations with family members, problems with siblings

and sibling rivalry, inconsistent role models and value systems in the family, minimal parental academic monitoring, guidance, and expectations.

Family Dysfunction

Family dysfunction appeared to influence the underachievement of several participants involved in the study. Participants stated that stressful events such as the serious illness of a family member or relative, a handicapped sibling and/or a change in the family structure influenced their home atmosphere which in turn influenced their moods, attitudes, and achievement in school. The stress often resulted in a difficult time for all family members. For instance, Yvellise described how a relative's terminal illness had an impact on her immediate family:

> My mother's brother is in the hospital. He has AIDS. She is suffering and I don't know why this is happening to her. I feel confused. Sometimes, I feel sorry, because I really don't understand. It is hard for her and for me. Sometimes I don't understand the things that have happened to us.

Milton believed that his severely handicapped sister was the family's main reason for staying in the U.S., and indicated that his mother thought her daughter received better medical care and educational opportunities in the States than in Puerto Rico. Milton's mother reported that meeting the demands of caring for her handicapped daughter produced high levels of stress. She was "tired, lonely, frustrated, and overwhelmed by so many things," according to Milton. In fact, Milton's mother was taking prescribed drugs for her depression. Milton's mother also mentioned that taking care of her handicapped daughter left her emotionally and physically exhausted which, in turn, affected the quality of interactions with the other family members. Her daughter's handicapped situation and her son's underachievement increased her feelings of helplessness. Milton's mother indicated that if her son keeps getting into trouble with the police, she was going to allow his social worker to take him to "one of those special schools" (referring to an institution for juvenile delinquents). Milton acknowledged his mother's efforts to take good care of him, his brother, and his sister, but he also recognized that sometimes she was not emotionally available for them due to her depression. He believed that he offered some support to his mother by helping her to take care of his sister during medical appointments. Milton explained:

> My sister is disabled. She is mentally retarded and blind. It is like having a huge baby. I help my mother. Sometimes, I don't go to school because I have to help my mother [referring to take his sister to medical appointments]. She can't carry my sister and the wheel chair. It is too much for her.

Benton also came from a home with family troubles. Benton's mother had remarried and the relationship between Benton and his stepfather was not healthy. Following a rather violent family fight in which Benton had struck his mother, and she was forced to call the Centerfield police, Benton's family received the services of a school social worker. Benton's guidance counselor had supported his mother through several difficult crises with her son. Benton's mother had expressed total frustration with the young man and explained that he consumed half of her energy. The other half of her life was filled with her new husband and Benton's younger brother, Tommy.

Miss Bothmer was Benton's elementary school art teacher, a soft-spoken, caring woman, who had watched Benton grow as a young artist. In an interview with Miss Bothmer, she reflected back on the little boy who drew fantasy-like characters and comic strips in the corner of her classroom for hours at a time. One of her most vivid memories of

Benton was painful for her. She remembered a parent conference with Benton's mother. She explained:

> I'll never forget something she said to him in front of me during a teacher conference. It's something I'll remember for the rest of my life. She said, "Benton, if you don't straighten out, I guess I'll have to give you up." I felt sick. I just couldn't imagine a parent saying that to their [sic] child.

Skip's family also appeared to be dysfunctional. Skip's father had deserted his wife and two sons when they were very young. He had returned from California after being gone for 15 years and brought back a friend who was now sleeping on the family sofa. Skip's mother had suffered nervous breakdowns and was having problems finding employment. Skip's only sibling had dropped out of high school and was having difficulty holding down a steady job. Skip commented that his parents were not at all consistent with him and he complained that all his parents ever heard from the school were bad reports, so "they were always on his back." He would be grounded at home after each disciplinary problem at South Central, but his parents never followed through completely with the punishment. When he defined what "being grounded" involved, he explained he couldn't talk to his new girlfriend on the phone and he had to do the dishes after dinner. When he was restricted from talking on the phone at home, he would sneak out of the apartment and call his girlfriend from a nearby pay phone.

Strained Relations With Family Members

Milton experienced consistent family conflicts because his friends caused arguments between his mother and him. His mother thought his friends were more important to him than his family. As with many other Puerto Rican parents with traditional values, Milton's mother placed a strong emphasis on the family. For Milton's mother, the family was first and came above friends. However, at this time in his life, Milton's priority was his friends. This difference of opinion about the importance of family and friends often provoked conflicts between Milton and his mother. Milton's mother believed that his friends were the source of most of his problems in and out of school, arguing that Milton's friends induced him to skip classes and to get involved in criminal activities such as public drunkenness and rides in stolen cars. These actions led him to unpleasant encounters with the state police. Milton admitted to skipping classes frequently in order to "chill out" with his "boyz" and other "cool dudes." Furthermore, Milton's mother was concerned about some of her son's friends who were drug dealers and was afraid that her son would get involved with drugs. The following statements illustrated two arguments between Milton and his mother:

> My mom thinks I'm crazy, I'm going crazy. She thinks, "Oh, you never used to be like this. What happened to you? Your friends messed you up." So I tell her I want to sell drugs (laughs). Because she gets me mad!

> I asked her for money, right? Like, let's say I want a pair of sneakers. I asked her for money, and she has the money. But she won't give it to me. She says, "Oh, I don't have no money." I start yelling at her. I tell her, "Who else am I going to turn to for money?" Sometimes, I just go to my bedroom.

Data gathered in this study support the idea that participants' confrontations with parents occurred primarily because of incongruent points of view regarding cultural values and age-related (adolescent) issues. Conflicting points of view between students and parents were specifically noted in relation to Puerto Rican traditional cultural values regarding interdependence/independence and "respeto" (respect) towards parental authority.

For example, Ivy had so many difficulties with her mother that she ran away and eventually moved in with her grandmother. As noted earlier, reports were found in her school records of suspected child abuse by her mother. Ivy had not seen her father in five years.

Ivy and her mother had an argument that caused Ivy to move to her grandmother's house. The problem arose one afternoon when her mother, having finished classes earlier and not having the keys to the house, had to wait on the street for one hour. When Ivy arrived, her mother started to argue with her about Ivy's reluctance to clean the house. Ivy took great offense at her mother's assertions and decided to leave:

> First, she says that I don't have friends and don't go anywhere, and now that I went somewhere after school, she got all mad. And then, she says I don't do anything at home, but I do the dishes, the dryer, and sweep the floor. So I packed my clothes and I left. She was so ignorant that she just said "bye."

Sandra, a senior at South Central High School, was born in Centerfield and lived there all her life. As a bicultural individual, Sandra possessed an integrated value system which included some features from the North American culture and some features from her Puerto Rican background. Sandra's personal principles about dating were similar to those valued by the majority, which in turn conflict with her parents' traditional values and beliefs regarding dating practices. Sandra described how her conception of appropriate dating practices differed from her parents' convictions and how this difference of opinions resulted in a negative relationship. Sandra had an Italian boyfriend who was currently attending a Job Corps Program in Vermont. They often wrote and called each other, and spent time together when he was back in Centerfield. Considering her parents' perspective on dating, Sandra decided to hide this relationship from them. Nonetheless, they found out about it. On one occasion, when Sandra went to visit her sister in college, her parents searched her book bag and found a letter that Sandra had written to a friend explaining her relationship with her boyfriend. According to Sandra, her parents expected her and her sister to be virgins until they got married, yet the American mainstream society did not reinforce this particular value. When Sandra's parents discovered that she was having an intimate relationship with her boyfriend, they considered their daughter immoral and disrespectful. Family problems arose, as Sandra explained:

> My parents found out that I was having an intimate relationship. They were devastated. . . . They expect a lot more out of my sister. They expect her to be good. For me, I'm the reject now. They said that I have to regain their trust. I'm basically in jail now. My mother gave me a two hour lecture about, "I don't want you with no guy. I don't want you calling guys." So basically guys are like a foreign country to me. I can't even step on that ground. For people our age [eighteen], having an intimate relationship with someone is normal. But they can't understand that. They wanted me to go over his house and tell his parents. I looked at her, I'm like, "You are ridiculous." I said that to her, "You are so ridiculous." I stood up and I'm like, "Why?" It's that she's so old fashioned. I'm not saying that having an intimate relationship with anybody is right, but I'm like, "Why Mom? Why even bother going?" I said "Okay, fine." I started laughing because I find them funny. She wants to hit me or whatever, and I'm like, "Okay, fine," and I'll just agree with anything she says. I'm like, "Just leave me alone and shut up."

Sandra also experienced uneasy family situations which negatively affected the climate of her home. Sandra's mother was diagnosed as "clinically depressed," a condition that affected her mother's emotional stability and availability to her children.

Problems With Siblings and Sibling Rivalry

Morgan was overshadowed by his older sister who was a powerful high achiever who succeeded in everything she became involved with at South Central. Morgan was honest in his discussion of his feelings. His remarks provided evidence that there was a sibling issue troubling him:

> I come here and nobody knows me as Morgan, they know me as Mary's brother and that's hard. It has always been like that. At Northeast School it was the same way. "Here is Mary's brother, or here is Mrs. McArthy's son." . . . So here . . . It will be nice when she leaves [laughs] but they are still going to know me as Mary's brother.

Morgan had been overshadowed all through elementary school by his older sister. Both Morgan and Mary described their relationship as "close." Mary evidently cared about her younger brother deeply. She described the dismay she felt when she and her brother were both finalists in a community-wide writing contest. Her brother had written a "wonderful" poem about baseball and she had written an essay and won $1,000.00. Her younger brother had received an engraved pen and pencil set. She said, "When I brought it up, he just shrugged it off." She explained that her brother's situation in school becoming a troublesome family issue: "Dad is a calm man. The only time I have heard him yell has been over Morgan's grades."

She summarized her perception of the issue by saying, "He's not an underachiever. He's just so unmotivated. I guess I'm an overachiever."

Mitch faced a similar situation with his younger brother. Mitch's brother Billy was an elementary school superstar academically but a real "klutz" athletically. Mitch was honest in saying he had no respect for his only sibling. He described his relationship with his brother and the problems involved:

> We don't get along. There are so many differences between us. He gets all As in school and he doesn't do sports. He got a D in gym. That really says a lot! He's a real slob. He's just the most disorganized, dirty person. My half of the bedroom is clean, the bed is made. His half is a disaster. He's got stuff all over the place. The boy is a slob! There is no other way to explain it. He makes high honors in school, but he's a slob! Sometimes he'll show off with his grades. When he does that, I teach him a lesson. He knows if he keeps it up, he'll get hurt.

In addition to conflicting relationships, tense relationships with siblings negatively influenced students' disposition to learn. Participants reported that discord with their siblings arose in relation to issues such as the use of the phone, the volume of the radio, unasked advice, and disappointment about family problems.

> He is . . . up. He's an addict. He's just hurting my mother. I don't care about him. Today, I had an argument with him. I told him I was going to hit him. I had hit him. I don't respect him for nothing. My brother ain't nothing. Some of my older brothers, they lecture me and I don't like it. "Don't mess up in school. Don't start selling drugs. Don't join a gang. Don't do this. Don't do that." (Chico)

> I don't get along with my older sister. I always find something bad about the things she does. She did not go to college and like my sister and her boyfriend, they stay for hours on the phone. I think it is stupid. I like talking on the phone, too. Sometimes when I start studying, the telephone rings and I have to answer the phone. It's a big problem. I get so mad at her. (Yvellise)

Although some hostility existed between students and their siblings, participants indicated that one way of coping with these situations was to have another sibling offer them support and, in a way, fill a gap. For instance, Yvellise reported feeling closer to her other sister as they shared similar interests and a common dislike for their older sister. She explained, "My sister is attending college and I want to go to college. I'm closer to her. My other sister, she is different." Similarly, Milton reported having a closer relationship with one of his half-brothers, "My brother, Jimmy, he's cool. He understands. He understands what I go through on the streets. He's been through it, too. Some of my older brothers, they lecture me and I don't like it." Milton also mentioned having a close relationship with his younger brother, with whom he is making plans for a future. Milton explained, "Me and him could do something together. He can get a job, and I can get a job, and we can find an apartment, and we pay the rent, and we buy the food."

Inconsistent Role Models and Value Systems in the Family

Jana is classified as an achiever in this study and yet her experiences are indicative of the sometimes blurry distinction between achievement and underachievement experienced by participants in this study. Several times during the course of this study, Jana seemed poised to waiver between achievement and underachievement. She readily agreed that her female peer network was the major factor that kept her in a pattern of achievement. Her mother's role modeling also was a motivating factor. Jana's mother had three children who each had a different father. Her only marriage had ended in divorce and financial problems plagued this family as her mother often worked ten or twelve hours a day to pay the bills. "I love my mother," Jana explained, "but I don't want to be like her." And so, Jana struggled to achieve and did so, despite numerous family obstacles. Many of the high achieving young people in this study faced difficult problems and for some, life was a daily struggle. Most of the underachieving students faced similar problems, yet they were not able to overcome these problems and succeed in school. For example, Yvellise's mother had been investigated for beating Yvellise, who had moved in with her grandparents. Some of the other underachieving students had severe family problems, which seemed to contribute to their underachievement. Others faced what the majority of the underachieving participants in this study faced: poverty, insecure family economic status, problems with parents or siblings, low parental expectations, and little guidance or academic support.

Chico had nine older half-brothers and half-sisters and he respected several of his older half-brothers while being disgusted with the remainder of them. Several of his older siblings had been successful in the military services. Another had received an athletic scholarship, graduated from college, and was successful in business. Living at home with Chico and his parents was an older half-brother described as an addict by Chico, who explained:

> He took coke when he was stationed in Japan. He's screwed up. He's been to rehab but it didn't work. He's hurting my mother and I don't respect him.

Chico indicated that his half-siblings nagged him and claimed that they all tried to give him advice about the way to run his life. Chico pointed out that he only responded positively to one of his half-brothers and that the rest were a source of conflict with him.

John admired his parents and agreed with their religious convictions, yet he looked to his siblings and found them struggling with issues which troubled him. John's family was torn over a religious issue as both parents were devout members of the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. They wanted their children to lead a moral lifestyle according to the teachings of their religion. John was raised in the religion and had chosen not be baptized yet because he knew his adolescent lifestyle was not always in accordance with the

teachings of his parents' church. He watched his sister "lose the fellowship" when she became an unwed mother. His older brother, who had a drinking problem, had also been ostracized by the congregation. Because of his father's work schedule as a freight truck driver, he was unable to attend all of the required meetings at church. His children were not following the lifestyle expected of members of the congregation. For this reason, John's father was not reappointed as an elder in the congregation. John explained the family's religious value system and his parents' lifestyle was something he was not ready to consider as a young adult,

> My parents want me to understand that when I am ready, they want me to have a wife from the same religion. I believe everything about the religion. I want to get baptized. I do. It's just that I want to wait until I am out of school. I cannot devote all of my time . . . between my work, and I know that I am doing stuff that's not all that bad but the church considers it not right, such as having friends outside the religion. If I made the decision to go totally into the religion and be baptized, I would have to give up all those friends and straighten out. I don't attend all the meetings. I am going to change that. I do believe in the religion. I was *raised* in it! I am going to straighten out.

Along with the religious issue, John's after-school employment was clearly a factor in his underachievement as he worked 37 hours a week at Bally's Health Club in Centerfield. There he was exposed to the promiscuous behavior of adults who worked out in the gym regularly. John explained that he realized many people who went there regularly were seeking sexual partners. He described scenarios where he was approached by older women who requested sexual favors from him. The young man whose family's religious belief system would never have allowed such behavior, was faced with uncomfortable predicaments in this environment. He continued to work at the health club but his job caused some problems. He explained,

> My mother says she doesn't want me to work. She says she doesn't see me enough. She doesn't want me to work while I am in school. She says it limits my abilities. She wants me to wait until after I finish school. Dad says if I can do it, then I should do it. He'll go along with whatever I want to do if I can do it.

John's father had two jobs and, in addition to his 60-hour work week as a freight truck driver, he taught aerobics classes part-time at Bally's Health Club. He had managed to obtain the job for his son at the health club and he was pleased that his son was managing to carry the responsibility. He often arrived home from work at 1:00 o'clock in the morning and would attempt to do homework until 3:00 o'clock in the morning. The next day in school, he tried to function on three hours of sleep. He fell asleep in class a number of times and his absentee record was very high. The administrators of South Central High School attempted to intervene but were unsuccessful in convincing his parents that the number of hours he was spending at the health club was not only inappropriate but also illegal. John explained how the job was interfering with his studies. He said:

> In English, I have to read these individual papers. I know it's because I am so tired. I know that if I were more alert I could understand what they were saying but sometimes it doesn't register. I am just too tired.

John earned an hourly wage of $6.00, and had an extensive wardrobe which, he explained, was the envy of his brother and sisters. However, the family value systems were not working in a way that would reinforce achievement in school.

Minimal Parental Academic Monitoring, Guidance, and Expectations

Participants in this study were aware of their parents' efforts to help in ways they could. Students recognized their parents' interest in having them "do good [well] in school" and to "do better" than their parents. Parents tried to encourage their children to succeed in school and life by using their own life experiences as examples to prevent their children from "making the same mistakes." Yet, parental help was frequently of limited quantity and quality. Sandra explained:

> My parents have always told me to do my work. They are always after me: "Do your work. Did you do your homework?" My mother doesn't know English. Well, she knows English, but she never had like passed fourth grade education. So I can't ask her for help. And my father, he is always working. I can't ask them for help. I have always had to do my work all by myself.

However, parents did not get actively involved in the school work required in high school. These parents expected their children to do their homework by themselves. As a result, doing homework was a decision left up to the student. On the other hand, students reported that they spend a good deal of time at home just watching TV, talking on the phone, listening to music, and/or playing Nintendo.

Milton's mother indicated that she provided her children with the necessary materials to go to school. In addition, she explained that although there is no specific place in the house to do homework, she prepared the dining table for her children if they want to do their homework:

> I didn't finish school, but I want my son to finish at least high school. He has everything he needs for school. I buy him notebooks, pencils, calculator. Here, no food is lacking. If he wants, I prepare him something to eat, and I clean the kitchen table so he can do his homework. That's it. I don't understand much of the class material, especially math. I am very bad in math. Furthermore, algebra is terrible!

Rose Marie lived with two siblings and her mother. Every day after four classes at South Central High School, Rose Marie attended the Academy of Performing Arts where she took three classes, and then attended sports practices which involve running cross country during the fall, gymnastics during the winter, and track and basketball during the winter. She was also part of the French Club and the Peer Counseling Program and participated in a church youth group. Rose Marie admitted that during the day she was "hyper," full of energy, but by the time she arrived at her home, she was exhausted, limiting her ability to do her homework. In addition to her active involvement in extracurricular activities and sports, Rose Marie believed that her deficient study habits were affecting her current academic status. She complained that her mother was not being supportive in this respect. For long years, Rose Marie's mother, a single parent, has spent most of her time working outside of the home trying to support a family.

According to Rose Marie, her mother's busy work schedule also limited her availability to help in academic matters. The responsibility of developing study habits and doing daily homework was left solely to Rose Marie:

> Sometimes when I get out of school, I'm, like, dead, by the end of the day. I go home and ask my mother to wake me up at ten in the night so I can do my homework. But she doesn't. . . . Then I wake up next morning, telling my mom, "Why didn't you wake me up?"

Although some parents had been notified of their children's placement in a gifted program and/or their academic talents, few parents recognized what the label meant or the implications of their child's ability. They believed their children were "smart"; however, they were not aware of their children's potential. They were uncertain about what to expect, what to do, and how to do it. Lack of knowledge regarding the concept of giftedness and its ramifications prevented parents from developing appropriate expectations for their children. Under these circumstances, parents' low expectations did not match their children's high potential. Parents were actually satisfied when their low expectations were fulfilled. Chico' mother's position sheds light in this regard:

> I know that [he] is smart. His teachers in elementary school used to tell me "Your kid is very bright." I know he can do it. I don't ask him for straight As, but at least to pass until he finishes high school.

Milton's mother shared this perspective. She recognized that her son was "very intelligent" and remembered, with some resentment directed toward the school district, when her son wanted to be a lawyer. Now, under the circumstances, she would be pleased if he finished high school and left the decision of pursuing postsecondary education up to her son.

Community Factors

In addition to numerous family problems, the underachievers faced the same types of community problems as did the achieving students, but somehow while the achievers were able to use their resilience to overcome problems, the students who underachieved were more susceptible to issues caused by community problems which included the following areas: negative school environment, hostile urban environment (violence, ethnic prejudice, and limited opportunities for entertainment), and inappropriate peer group issues

Negative School Environment

With the following words, Morgan explained about the influence of his environment and his peer group's attitude within that setting:

> It's hard to do well in a school where you are not respected for doing well academically. That's why I was thinking seriously about a nearby private school. There, learning is expected in an environment where you are supposed to learn. Here, that's not always true. You'll be considered a nerd.

Skip also blamed his lack of motivation on his environment:

> In the suburbs, there are no kids hanging out in the streets and there is more pressure to do good. Here the peer pressure is to do bad. . . . There are no dances here. There is no fun stuff going on. At other schools, they have dances, they have fun. They have out of school activities that keep kids together. We don't have anything like that. Maybe if I lived in Newton and went to another school, my grades would go up.

Ivy concurred with other participants about the negative school environment and discussed, as did several other students, the recent problems with gangs in school:

> There are many gangs in the school. There was a fight in the lunchroom. It was bad, and a lot of people were suspended. If you are part of a gang and I am part of another gang they hit each other for stupid little things. They kill each other or

> someone else you know. People probably get into gangs because they don't have families. If you want to go out, they beat you off and you stay on the floor bleeding. I was told that to get into a gang you become friends, go to one of the meetings, and meet the president. You will be on probation for a month. There are 60 rules you have to memorize. If you have a problem with other people, the gang protects you, but that can be even worse if the other person is in another gang. I wanted to join the Young Solidas, but a girl was down and she told me all the information. They say they are an organization, but that is not true because they are not organized. People say gangs are only killing each other. The police says they are gangs because they are causing problems. The gangs have a lot of everything: Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Jamaicans. The Kings were all supposed to be Latins, but now anybody can join them. The Dubbs are mostly Blacks and Puerto Ricans.

The negative environment was evidenced in a variety of ways and influenced how many bright young people became discouraged with their efforts to strive for success at South Central High School. In a conversation with a guidance counselor about the length of an academic awards assembly, the counselor explained the guidance staff had to keep the assembly limited to one hour since the faculty would be "looking at their watches." He commented, "It's not an issue of crowd control, it's a teacher union issue." One bright young woman described her frustration when she commented about an apathetic environment:

> North Central High has already selected a Homecoming Court. We haven't voted yet. All the other high schools have already been to see *Malcolm X* at a local theater. By the time this school gets around to selling tickets, we will have seen it on our VCRs!

John indicated that his environment influenced how he felt about responding to questions in classes. He described classrooms where he felt the apathy squelching class discussions and he personally became part of that mentality by not responding to the teacher. He said:

> Teachers never know the talent of the students here because they don't want to answer questions. I know a lot of times, we'll be having open discussions and the teacher will ask questions. I know the kids know the answers. They just don't bother to answer. They look at the teacher as though they are stupid. My English teacher is always asking a lot of questions and they are so simple. They are so simple! I know they learned this simple stuff in elementary school. Nobody wants to admit it.

Hostile Urban Environment

Participants discussed the hostile environment, the influence of the surrounding community, and its influence on their personal life and school performance. The local community was plagued with gang-related conflicts, prejudice, and limited opportunities for entertainment. Consequently, students felt unsafe, bored, and uncomfortable with their social life conditions.

Centerfield was plagued by increasing gang-related incidents which involved fights and crime activities such as drug dealing and homicides. The two most important Latino gangs in Centerfield were the "Latin Kings" and "Los Solidos." A third one, which broke up a while ago, was called the "Ñetas." These gangs ran their own drug cartels, and offered young people from poor neighborhoods an opportunity for making money. Gang membership provided an alternative means for economic advancement. In addition to access

to better economic conditions, gang membership involved emotional support. After a trial period, gang members counted on the protection of their fellow members. Although none of the participants in this study was an actual active member of these gangs, they were all cognizant of the situation. They believed that the common fights and drug dealing in and out of the school, as well as the killing in their neighborhoods, had a negative impact on them. The latest killing of young gang members incited a sense of despair in these students. Participants felt threatened, scared, and unsafe. Yvellise said: "I don't feel confident or safe being around. You don't know what is going to happen." Marwin argued that some students at South Central High School are gang members and that several of them sell drugs at the school:

> I see kids like going into the bathroom. They smoke pot and stuff in the bathroom. You smell it all over the school, every day in the stairs. I don't know anything about it because if you said something, and they catch the people, then you are just going to be in trouble. Around the area is really bad because everywhere you go you see people selling drugs. People would ask me sometimes if I want to buy drugs.

Sandra indicated that some of her friends are gang members, and that she used to date a guy who "ended up signing up a contract with them in jail." She also mentioned that gang membership is for both males and females and that gang members are not only teenagers, but also children and adults. Sandra reported that her girlfriends want her to join the "Latin Queens" but she had different plans: "They are like 'Come on, you'll have much more respect than you do, and you have so much protection. Nobody will mess around with you,' and I'm like, 'No, I can't do that. I'm sorry.'" Sandra's knowledge and perceptions of the gangs and their activities clarified these issues:

> They're just so violent. They fight people and they do drugs and they end up in jail. They sell cocaine. They usually deal with arms like guns and all that stuff. There's too much violence, like this school. There's so many of them in here. They be all in the front of the school after school and they be fighting sometimes. Sometimes they just hang out there and wait for their boys to come out of school, pick them up, take them home, like that. It's just too much, you know. It's just so hard because they be talking about, "Oh, we want people to join us." It's like you see it and you be scared to live in the city and you want the protection. So you want to get into a gang so that you have somebody like to protect you, and those people call themselves a family. Like if you don't have a family at home but you want to be with somebody to take care of you, that's your family. They call each other brothers and sisters. You know, some of them have their lives threatened by other people, so they're just scared. They just want the protection. It's pretty tough to get out. Once you are in, you can't get out. It's hard, but my goal is just to survive. If I can make it, well I'll have a future.

Some of the achieving students worried that the problems caused by gangs and violence would result in their extracurricular activities being curtailed and canceled, and the effect that this would have on their achievement. Jana explained:

> My mother has told me that if the drive by shootings and gang problems continue, I will not be able to continue my involvement in athletics and all of my clubs, including National Honor Society. I would be lost without that!

Another issue experienced by participants who underachieved was ethnic prejudice by other citizens and/or institutions. Milton experienced unpleasant encounters with people who have denigrated him. He explained:

> People think they are better than you. I was with my friends in McDonald's. A McDonald's in Windon. And there were people in there, and they were calling us "Spics." They wanted us to leave. There were some dudes in there, and stuff, and they were a lot bigger than us, so we didn't fight. We left. I was embarrassed that people were calling me a "Spic." A "Spic" is like calling a Black person a "nigger."

He also claimed that racism still exists, and that he can see it.

> They look at you wrong just because I have two earrings on my ear, and/or I wear a hood. That doesn't mean I'm on drugs, or I'm going to kill somebody, or I'm going to rob a bank or something.

Milton was also confused about the idea of being a "minority, " and he explained:

> "Why do we have to be minorities? Why can't we be like White people? We're minorities because they make us minorities and because we're ignorant enough to take what they tell us, and do it. I don't like it."

He further discussed his problem in relation to school: "Most Puerto Ricans and Blacks prefer to go to the streets than go to the school and learn. I'd rather follow their way than having a White teacher telling me what to do." He was confused about being street smart or being a "preppie" in school. He decided to be street smart which he perceived was the best way to get money, gold, nice clothing and the respect of others. He explained: "It's not complicated. It's a lot easier than going to school. People look up to you. You're going to be a leader. You're not going to be a follower. You won't be like everybody else."

Other participants reported unpleasant encounters due to ethnic prejudice. For example, Milton talked about an incident with the police who decided to stop his brother and him because they looked suspicious. Sandra also mentioned that while she was working in McDonalds, she experienced difficulties with her manager because he used to make undesirable comments about Puerto Rican females:

> He wasn't like sexually harassing me but like because of my ethnicity he was like "You are easy. All Puerto Rican girls are easy—how many boyfriends do you have?" I would take it as a joke but I would get offended. I didn't want to say anything because he is one of the managers there. They won't believe me anyway. He kept getting on my nerves and he said he would call me "bitch." He did it a couple of times and I said "I have a name."

Yvellise said that she had difficulties when people labeled her Hispanic and/or Puerto Rican. She commented: "Of course, I'm Hispanic; I'm Puerto Rican. But does that mean I'm lazy, the fights, and everything? I'm embarrassed. Maybe people will think that because one Puerto Rican did this, all of them are like that. It's not true, though." Sandra agreed with Yvellise, and indicated:

> We are looked upon like all minorities and I don't really like that because I think Hispanics and Blacks compose the majority of the city, and I don't like that because they group all the Puerto Ricans in one spot like certain people that are on the welfare. I'm not on welfare.

Few opportunities for constructive entertainment was another community factor that participants perceived as affecting their lives. Participants described Centerfield as a dirty, poor, violent, and boring city that offers nothing for young people. With the exception of school sports or clubs, participants believed that there was little for them to do in

Centerfield. However, several of the participants who were underachieving were not allowed to participate in school sports because their current academic performance is equivalent to less than a C average. Sandra complained that young people cannot find jobs, and without money, they cannot have fun in Centerfield. Marwin indicated that he dislikes Centerfield, and one way of dealing with this situation is by going to a nearby smaller city every weekend. He stayed with an uncle and gets to spend time with his "real friends." Marwin explained that this situation influenced his disposition for learning:

> It's just blah! I don't like it. I don't even spend time in Centerfield. When I'm in Centerfield, I'm at my house or at school, and that's it. On Friday, right when I get home, I get my stuff ready, and off to [a nearby suburb] I go. I want to get out. I think that if I was in a place that I would like to be, like, say, in Cooperville, I'd be able to do a lot more stuff, because there's nothing to do in the city. In the city, I can't make friends. I have no friends in Centerfield. Not friends that I'd call friends. They like to do different things. If I was in a place that I wanted to be, I'd have more time to do my homework, I'd know that after I do my homework, I could go out and do something else that I want to do, that would be fun. In Centerfield, I can do stuff in the daytime, and then I can't go out at night because my mother doesn't like me out at night.

Under these circumstances, participants experienced feelings of loneliness and confusion towards their local community. Although they experienced a need to belong, they also wanted to escape from an immediate, potentially dangerous situation.

Inappropriate Peer Group Issues

The friends selected by the high ability underachievers also seemed to cause problems for some of these bright young people who were having difficulties fulfilling their academic responsibilities. Most of the males in this group faced peer group issues which appeared to negatively influence their attitudes toward academic achievement.

Mitch was surrounded by not only a younger brother who was an academic superstar in elementary school, but also a neighborhood of young men his age who were all high honor roll students in his class. His three closest friends were all young men who grew up with Mitch and lived in the same neighborhood. This circle of friends was something Mitch was losing when he was forced to drop his honors level classes. Along with seeing less of his best friends in school, several of these friends had a tendency to nag Mitch about his lack of effort in school. "He's so lazy!" was something that was heard occasionally from these teenagers who felt they needed to let him know they were concerned. Mitch had difficulty dealing with this peer group nagging and would become rather explosive when his friends "got on his case."

Chico admitted that his selection of friends had adversely affected him during his freshman year. He explained:

> This year I have a lot of sophomores in my classes. They are not my friends. That's why I did good last year and this year. Some of my friends went on. I had to stay back in freshman classes. Now I am in sophomore classes and I should be a junior. I don't fool around as much because my best friends aren't with me, the guys I came to school with.

The peer group was important to Chico. His friends appeared to direct his life after school. When making arrangements to visit the Marine recruiter's office, Chico refused to go an afternoon after school because that meant time away from his friends. He explained

he enjoyed "chillin' out on a gang hang-out street" with his three best friends, Eric, Pete and Pappito. This was a commercial street filled with small Hispanic businesses. Police officers with billy clubs and officers in cruisers patrolled the street constantly as it had a reputation for being an area of the city plagued with gang warfare problems. Chico's math teacher recognized that Chico was intrigued with the gang activity and noted, "He wants to look to the streets, but he's too smart."

Chico claimed he was poor, yet he arrived for one interview with a large roll of twenty dollar bills which he proceeded to count throughout the interview. He was wearing a new pair of Nike sneakers which he said he had purchased in the Bronx for $189. Where he and his friends were getting the money to pursue their shopping excursions to the Bronx was something Chico did not care to discuss. Chico arrived for an interview one morning wearing a beeper and proudly demonstrated how it worked. The electronic devices worn by some South Central High School students were confiscated by the school's administrators. Chico had managed to keep his beeper well concealed. According to students, the beeper was a method for keeping in touch with drug pushers. The question became whether the students were actually involved in drug running for a pusher or whether the beepers were simply a status symbol for the young men. When questioned about this, Chico did not reply.

The peer group issue was discussed with Chico's mother who expressed concern about her son since she saw so little of him after school. Chico also mentioned that his mother was constantly complaining that he never spent time at home with his parents and she worried about him. Chico had a short-lived relationship with Eva, an older girl, who had graduated from South Central High School. Eva was working in a factory and trying to decide if she should attend college. Eventually, Chico called off the relationship with the young woman but would not discuss the details of their parting.

Several of Chico's half-brothers nagged him about his selection of friends and their after school activities. He explained:

> Some of my older brothers, they lecture me and I don't like it. "Don't mess up in school. Don't start selling drugs. Don't join a gang. Don't do this. Don't do that." My brother Ralf, he'll say he's seen the streets.

When Chico was asked to describe the streets, he replied, "Hell." His cryptic response was perhaps an appropriate way to describe the turmoil the young man felt when he considered his options for friends and support systems in and out of school.

When he was not playing football, Skip surrounded himself with students who were not successful in school. In his freshman year, his older brother, who had been in ninth grade for three years, was in Skip's homeroom class and would convince Skip to join his friends in leaving the school campus for the day. Skip apparently understood the influence his peer group had on him.

> There are a lot of kids just wasting away. They're failing. Kids like me. . . . It's a place to hang out. Everybody like me stays in school for social reasons. They see their friends here every day. They take the time to go to their lockers, but they don't take home books. If they took school seriously, they might do great. There are so many failing students here because they skip classes. If they tried, they could be A students.

Though Skip realized his problem with a peer group that negatively influenced him, he explained his salvation was the football team:

> If it wasn't for football, I wouldn't be in school now. I look forward to it every day. Being with my friends, working out with weights makes school fun. It's training for life. . . . If I didn't have football I would have quit as a freshman.

Skip knew that his peer group was influencing his underachievement since he compared his situation at South Central with the lifestyle of his academically-oriented girlfriend from a nearby suburban high school. Skip's girlfriend, Dolores, had emigrated with her family from Poland as a young girl, and Skip claimed her parents were still "European-style strict parents." Dolores was an honors student and she wanted her new boyfriend to achieve academically. Dolores had plans for college and Skip pointed out that they had been going out for "one month and two days." This was the longest relationship, he had ever had with a young woman and she was the "best girlfriend he had ever had." She wore Skip's varsity football jacket to her high school. He explained, "This is proof that she really cares for me. She wants to show all the guys at her school that she's taken."

Though Skip struggled to find a support system with the more positive peer group of Dolores and her suburban high school friends, he had difficulty. Dolores's parents did not approve of her relationship with Skip. They did not want him in their home, yet he climbed through the window of Dolores's home one evening while her parents were away and the neighbors had reported him. Skip explained, "They're just jealous!" Having experienced a different environment and group of students at Dolores's school dances and athletic events, Skip decided he would be a different student if he attended school in the suburbs. He said, "Skip from Winslow would be different from the Skip from this city."

Personal Factors Influencing Academic Underachievement

The high ability underachievers apparently were bored with their curriculum, negatively influenced by their peers and their dismal surroundings, and had few strategies for constructively dealing with these problems. Accordingly, the following personal problems had an impact on their achievement in school: behavior problems and disciplinary issues, problems with unstructured time, confused or unrealistic aspirations, insufficient perseverance and low self efficacy, and inappropriate coping strategies.

Behavior Problems and Disciplinary Issues

Many of the young people, particularly the males in this group, faced disciplinary problems for their poor behavior in classes and in school. This was documented by an extensive collection of disciplinary reports in their permanent record files. The behavior of several of the students who underachieved in their classes was observed throughout the study, and several of the young men were repeatedly seen with their heads down on a desk either sleeping or hiding under a hooded sweatshirt. Some teachers would allow them to remain that way, while others insisted they sit up and participate in class. Skip would often be seen lying horizontally across several chairs in the North Commons study hall while the paraprofessionals attempted to maintain order. The behavior of the females was less disruptive and resulted in minor reprimands for infractions such as: combing their hair, applying make-up, sleeping, and talking or laughing too loudly with friends.

Benton, the young artist, associated with a younger group of students from his neighborhood. His closest friend, Tyson, was a freshman who was involved in a new program at South Central High School, designed as an intervention by the administration in cooperation with the state university. Graduate students from the university maintained an experimental "Sheltered Study Hall" for a large group of ninth graders who were designated at-risk students. The goal of the program was to provide students with enrichment activities on a weekly basis during their early morning study hall in hopes of getting the youngsters

to come to school. Tyson told his friend Benton about the Talent Show the study hall students were preparing. Benton joined the freshmen in the first period study hall, convinced the graduate students he belonged there, and eventually became designated as the "dance coordinator" for the special talent show. Benton arrived every day and supervised his freshman friends in dance routines. While Benton was involved in the Sheltered Study Hall activities, his absentee record in his first period U.S. History class was increasing daily. He was failing his history course because of the number of days he skipped class and because he was not submitting assignments to his teacher.

When the Sheltered Study Hall students celebrated a multicultural buffet breakfast, Benton attended and served as the disc jockey for the special event. Though the young man was supposed to be attending his history class, his talents were being recognized by people who appreciated him in the Sheltered Study Hall. When his friend Tyson danced in the center of the room in his "street-style" dance, Benton commented, "I taught him everything I know. He learned from the best." Benton's career as a disc jockey and dance coordinator was short-lived. Once the graduate students from the university realized Benton was skipping classes, they were forced to counsel him to return to his first period U.S. History class.

Skip described several problems with discipline. One day, he had been involved in a fight in study hall because he started a prank on another student, spraying hair spray in another young man's hair. The young man hollered, "You are messin' with the wrong person!" A skirmish followed in which Skip slugged the student in the face. The young man's eyeglasses broke and he had to be rushed to the hospital for stitches near his eye. Skip was then expelled from school. On other occasions, Skip spent time in the in-house suspension program held on the school grounds.

Skip, the bright underachiever, devised a plan to get around the in-house suspension program. He explained his philosophy concerning the disciplinary measure and described his strategy for avoiding time there. He said,

> It's the dumbest thing I've ever heard of in my life. If you get outside suspension, you get to stay home and watch "The Price is Right." It's just like if I was in prison and I started a fight. They would send me home for a week's vacation. It makes just as much sense. In in-house suspension, you sit in a room all day and there is no teaching. It just doesn't make sense. They have you with other kids like you cutting up all day. No homework is done. The monitor is a lady who controls the place. So what do you do? You start a little rumble and you get a little vacation.

Problems With Unstructured Time

Several of the participants indicated that they had problems with unstructured time. Sandra and Yvellise read and watched television most of the time they were not in school.

Morgan was honest about his poor use of unstructured time. On the morning of his first interview for the study which was being conducted in the media center, he said he had never been to the library/media center. Any time he was needed for the study, Morgan could be found hanging out by the pool. Though Coach Brogan discouraged his swimmers from coming to the pool without a definite purpose, Morgan used the facility to carry on his new romance with his girlfriend, Dorothy, a member of the women's swim team. Dorothy was ranked first in their sophomore class and had a reputation as a highly motivated young woman. She was also concerned about Morgan's lack of effort in several of his courses, yet she continued to meet her boyfriend for each daily rendezvous. Morgan claimed that his swim team involvement was making the difference for him at South Central. After his

freshman year, he had dropped band and the baseball team and was concentrating all of his energies on swimming and the new relationship with Dorothy.

Morgan admitted that his unstructured time was a problem after dinner. He spent time on the phone with Dorothy and this too had become a family issue. He explained:

> My parents try to organize my time. I had a long talk with my Dad. We wrote out a schedule. I had a daily schedule. He asked me what I wanted to do with my life. I was upset, too. "From this hour to this hour, no matter what is going on, you are either going to do homework or read." That was fine. After one week, we didn't do it any more.

Skip considered the football team his salvation. During football season, his time was structured and academics were important to him for he knew he had to maintain a C average to remain eligible to play on the team. Without the team, his unstructured time became a problem. Skip knew that his involvement on the team made a difference, and he simply had not figured out a way to transfer the drive he had for the sport into a similar motivation in school. Skip's description of his problem is evidence of the young man's turmoil over his underachievement. He said:

> What's the solution? An alcoholic can go to a clinic and get cured. What's there for me? I'm searching for a combination. I think it's football. Football drives me. I have the drive to make all-Conference, to win the games. During the second and third marking periods, when I don't have to worry about being eligible to play, I have no drive to achieve.

Mitch was the third underachiever in the study who was involved in extracurricular activities, but seemed to be having problems with unstructured time. Mitch claimed the football team was his support system. Though he spent some time working out with the team in the weight room after school, his best friends were still the childhood friends he had from his neighborhood. He was involved in Junior Achievement and the Boys Scouts with his three neighborhood friends, but had withdrawn from the wrestling, baseball, and indoor track teams. He described his experience with the wrestling team as a frustrating experience "rolling around on the floor with little mutants." He explained he was "50 pounds overweight and it wasn't muscle." Instead, Mitch chose "a boring job" as a cashier at a neighborhood gas station where he "punched keys on the cash register all day and sold cigarettes."

Few underachieving participants were involved in any outside extracurricular activities. Sandra and Yvellise watched television and read novels. John spent 37 hours a week working at the health club, and Benton convinced his mother to allow him to apply for a cashier's job at a local department store. None of the high ability underachievers were involved in the summer programs or enrichment opportunities experienced by the achievers in the study. Instead, several of them spoke of attending the remedial summer school program sponsored by the city schools for students who had failed classes and needed to make up credits to fulfill graduation requirements.

Confused or Unrealistic Aspirations

A majority of the underachieving young people in the study appeared to have aspirations that were either confused or unrealistic. Most seemed out of touch with the reality of their situation. For example, Skip, the high school linebacker who had a dismal record of academic failure and discipline problems, dreamed of attending a New England college, "not too far from home," a large enough school where he had a good chance of

being recognized by professional recruiters. Perhaps Skip thought that being recognized by a professional football team would solve the problems he currently faced at South Central High.

Morgan's comments concerning his future plans were an indication that he had not fully explored his strengths nor had he attempted to match his talents to his goals and dreams. He said:

> I was thinking law, but I hear people say that the law field is glutted with lawyers. I don't really enjoy history and law anyway. I've always said math is my favorite subject, so I think I'd like to do something with math. I've been thinking about just that lately.

Rose Marie also had confused aspirations, indicating that she wanted to be a college or university professor and she spoke about her desire to attend a Catholic college. However, she had behavioral problems and many negative encounters with her parents and her peers. Her academic record, alone, would have resulted in her rejection from Catholic school.

Mitch seemed to have aspirations that were totally incongruent with his record of achievement at South Central High School. He mentioned Ivy League schools and other high-powered colleges he wanted to attend, yet he may have been aware that those aspirations were unrealistic. Mitch's upsetting realization of having to attend college in his backyard is reflected in his discussion of his choices for the future. He said:

> I want to look at Dartmouth, Columbia, Cornell and other good schools along the East Coast. I'll apply to Syracuse and the state university. I'll probably end up going to [state university]. We are not rich, but if it comes right down to it, I'll go to the branch, as long as I go to college, as long as I go to college.

Just as Mitch was confused about college and career aspirations, his thoughts on a major were not clear. This was reflected in his discussion when he said:

> I don't know why I am considering business administration when my strength is English. The idea of business just came to me. I know I want to have my own business. Maybe a hardware store. My English will come in handy with marketing. I'd like to have my own business. Something like a hardware store. Not a super chain like K-Mart.

Mitch had dealt with nagging from his mother concerning his inconsistent record of achievement and now he faced peer pressure to apply to college. The group of friends from the neighborhood were all planning to attend college so he, too, needed to be thinking about his plans. When asked how he felt about his inconsistent record of academic achievement, he explained he knew he had to improve because he would not reach his goals. In his discussion of his goals and aspirations, Mitch revealed some pressure from his peers. He said:

> Basically, if I don't do well, I won't get into college. College right now is tops on my list. I want to go to college but I don't want to go to a community college. Even the branch of [state university] would be okay if that's what I had to do to get into [state university]. My friends are going to college. All the people that I know want to go to college. Nobody *wants* to see anybody else *not* go to college. We all know that we are headed in that direction.

Benton, the artist, dreamed of pursuing his passion for art through his career. He said, "I want to be a commercial artist because it's easier to make money." Benton discussed plans for attending a commercial art school in Florida, a college that was brought to his attention by an intern in the guidance office at South Central High. He claimed he would do whatever it took to get accepted into that program, yet the young artist who planned on a lucrative career did not appear to make a connection with his aspirations and his dismal performance in his Art I class at South Central High School.

Two students, Chico and John, had definite aspirations that seemed aligned with their interests and academic strength areas. Chico planned on entering the Marines to obtain his college education. He knew his family's economic situation would not enable him to attend college on his own, therefore he realized he had to depend on an alternative route to his dreams. He thought a stint as "a reconnaissance man" would be exciting for awhile and the military training and G.I. benefits would eventually lead him to his goal of a Bachelor's degree in business administration. He talked of wanting to operate his own business, but "definitely not a grocery store!" He talked of marriage and having a family of three children. Chico had talked about his plans for a life in the Marines throughout his interviews, yet he had done nothing to investigate this interest. When he was taken to the recruiting office to explore the possibility, he was asked to conduct a simple activity in establishing priorities.

As he sat at the Marine recruiter's desk, his left knee twitching throughout the interview, he was asked to select three goal statements from a collection of cards on the recruiter's desk. He chose "educational opportunity"; "financial security"; and "discipline, direction, and reliance." When asked by the soldier how he felt about the possibility of joining the U.S. Marines on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being a highly positive rating, he smiled broadly and replied "9 and 1/2!"

John, the automotive enthusiast, knew exactly where he wanted to be following high school. His goal of becoming an auto mechanic and owning his own garage was discussed throughout every conversation with John. He was definite about his plans and seemed passionate about his goals. He said:

> My first choice will be the technical school, but I have to get my diploma. I want to go there for two years for the auto tech program. I will get certified as an auto mechanic. I think there is a state test to get a certificate. I'll get a diploma from the technical school, but the certification comes from the state of Connecticut. When you graduate from the technical school, you have all the knowledge of a certified mechanic but you can't be certified until you take the test.

His only roadblock was the diploma from South Central High School. Whether or not John would manage to solve his own attendance problem, pass his courses, and earn the credits he needed would determine if he would graduate from school.

Insufficient Perseverance and Low Self Efficacy

According to the data gathered in this study, underachieving participants had difficulty in persevering as is evident in different aspects of their lives. For example, Sandra reporting giving up several things in her life. She explained that usually her "interest for something builds up," but then she just "messes around and gives it up." For her, this attitude emerged most often during emotionally stressful times provoked by arguments with her mother, and when she was feeling depressed. "Giving up" was also evident in some school-related interests as well as personal hobbies such as playing the guitar and the flute.

> When I was younger, I got this idea in my head that I wanted to play the guitar, so me and my father went to get guitar lessons, and I was in it for a while. It was an old man, and he just taught stupid things that I hated. So I stopped going. Then a man in my school was making this group of students who play guitar and I said "Oh, I play guitar." I was the only girl. We were good together. We played on channel 26, at a university, and at an activity of the Board of Education. That died down too. I started going to lessons again at the center, and I learned a lot. But then gave it up. I had problems.

As noted earlier, participants experienced a need to be more productive in their academic work by middle and high school. Participants also reported trying to manage these new school demands by working harder and developing perseverance. However, they were not successful in this attempt and eventually began to believe they were lazy. Eventually, they came to believe that if they only decided to exert more effort, they would be able to succeed in school. For example, Sandra indicated feeling lazy and added, "I go home, I look at my school work and I'm like 'is the teacher gonna collect it? . . . check it?' If not, I won't do it." Yvellise also believed that she was lazy and that she gave up easily, especially when she worked on her homework:

> I don't do much studying. I do it when I have to. I'm just lazy. I don't like the work. If it is easy, I do it [laughs]. If it is hard, I'll take my time, but I'll try. I don't know why, but I give up too easily.

Milton expanded on this, explaining that it was easier for him to persevere if the task was easy or required little effort from him: "If it's difficult, and hard, and I have to do a lot of things just to accomplish that, I wouldn't bother with it." When asked why, Milton replied, "Because I'm a lazy person," but immediately added "I'm not lazy, because I can get up every morning and come to school, if I wanted." Chico also indicated that one of the reasons he failed during his freshman year was his laziness, which was further exacerbated by boring classes.

The majority of students who underachieved in this study indicated that before entering high school, they had high expectations about their high school experiences. For example, Yvellise reported that she thought high school was going to be harder, however, when she got to South Central she realized that it was not "that great." Milton explained that he was expecting "something else" that "it was going to be real fun," but instead he found that high school was boring. Most also agreed that they attended school because they had to and not because they wanted to come. Yvellise said: "I don't like coming here, but I have to, and I come every day." Sandra concurred: "I hate this school. I just come because I have to come to school." Milton was at the highest risk of dropping out of school as his high absenteeism has caused him to lose school credits which meant he might stay back in ninth grade. For Milton, attending high school was not the "only way to succeed in life." He wanted to "have fun now because all of us are going to die sooner or later anyway." He wanted to make sure that he was going to "enjoy" his life before dying. For this purpose, attending high school seemed both unnecessary and a waste of time. He explained: "I don't want no education. School is nothing to me. I don't care about it. I don't need that."

Participants reported not only feeling lazy but also being confused about their own level of ability and competence. They also revealed feeling uncertain about their capacity to compete with others. They reported feeling uncomfortable in competitive situations, since they experienced doubts about their abilities to meet the demands of this type of situation. Most reported being aware of their high abilities, but saying that they preferred not to compete. In this respect, experiencing failure in their efforts to overcome school-related

difficulties further eroded their sense of efficacy and even their sense of worth. For example, Milton believed that his teachers and other people around him expected too much from him. He indicated that this situation put a lot of pressure on him, and made him wonder about his potential to fulfill those expectations. In addition, Milton experienced instances of perceived failure in his academic endeavors, his self-image as well as his ability to overcome the difficulties were lowered.

Sandra frequently deprecated her talents. On several occasions, Sandra attributed receiving good grades to her teachers "giving" them to her and not to her own effort. When she spoke about successful past experiences, Sandra mentioned the many awards that she got in kindergarten and her special award for writing a "young author's book" when she was in fifth grade. However, with some resentment in her voice, she concluded both stories by saying, "Anybody can do good in kindergarten." and "Although I won for the school, it was a stupid murder story." In addition, when asked about her goals after high school, she said "I want to go to college, like any other person does." When she was in high school, Sandra's sense of worth was so damaged by her family conflicts that she attempted suicide:

> I did it because I thought I was the cause of my family's problems. So I thought, yes, let me just get rid of myself and everybody will be happy. My mother will be happy and my mother won't be crying no more because of me; my mother won't be sick no more because of me. Also, because like if things would happen in my house, my father would come to me, like, "Go calm your mother down." Like I would be the one that everybody will focus their attention on to keep the family together. It was too much pressure besides the fact that I was the only natural daughter. My mother would be like, "I gave birth to you." I'd say, "But I don't ask to be born." It's like all that guilt. All of that just got to me and I was like let me pop a couple of pills and just die, and that's it.

Inappropriate Coping Strategies

In order to protect themselves from negative experiences, students reacted negatively and became defensive towards painful family, school, social and personal experiences. For instance, Sandra tried to commit suicide because of family conflicts. Milton decided to stop doing his school work, and instead, devoted his energies to making friends. Milton also decided to place more importance on his friends than on his academic performance. Marwin chose to express his unhappiness with school work by displaying disruptive and aggressive behaviors in his classes. Yvellise resisted by spending most of her time reading novels and watching TV.

Participants reported becoming more concerned with avoiding failure than with achieving success. Sandra indicated that she was afraid of the grading system in one of her music classes. Although she had approximately four years of experience playing the flute, the idea of being graded in her band class was problematic to her and she consequently decided to quit at the beginning of the class.

> I used to play the flute. I played the flute from fifth through ninth grade. But I quit band because I heard they graded you. One time when I wrote music, I got an F. When I heard that we had to take a test, I said to myself, "No more band for me. I'm sorry," and I just gave it up.

Rose Marie, on the other hand, chose to procrastinate in terms of her school work. Procrastination prevented her from facing the need for more effort and perseverance. In fact, on several occasions, she questioned whether she really had high abilities. At the beginning, putting school work off provided immediate relief for Rose Marie, but as time

passed, it became a powerful source of pressure and stress which negatively affected her academic performance. Rose Marie compared her school work with her running experience. The beginning of first marking period of the school year (first lap) went smoothly for Rose Marie, but when classes started to be more demanding during the second marking period (second lap), she started putting school work off. By the third marking period (third lap), she was behind on her school work and was feeling overwhelmed and anxious about her academic status. Finally, at the last minute or during the fourth marking period (last lap), she tried to make a frenzied effort to catch up on her school work, leaving her exhausted and sometimes unable to keep up:

> The first lap is okay. The second lap I start to feel short of breath. The third lap, it kills me. I'm always low on the third lap. So I have to pick it up on the third lap. My coach yells at me, "Pick it up, pick it up." I'm like "Oh, gosh!" I feel so guilty! And then the last lap is the best lap. Even if I feel awful, I go and finish it up. Can you see any similarity with my school work? This marking period is like the last lap. I'm really trying, because I still have all that energy that I didn't realize I had before.

Milton's reaction to perceived failure was much more extreme. As mentioned before, Milton seemed to be at the highest risk of dropping out of school of all participants in the study. In order to avoid the pressure of other people's expectations and judgments, Milton decided to do what he chose. Actively, he reacted against the school context and affirmed that street life is more desirable and rewarding for him.

> If I don't finish high school now, I can do it later, when I want to do it. When I feel I can do it. I don't feel like doing it now, though. I'm not getting no knowledge from school now. Look, I can go on the street. It's not complicated. It's easy. It's a lot easier than going to school. I want to have easy classes, so I can breeze through it. And I can still make big money on the side lines, too. What I am trying to say is that I still have that smartness. I still have the ability to do it if I wanted to. But I don't want to do that. It's my mind. I can waste it if I want to.

Street life provided Milton with the means to be recognized by others, something that his actual academic status does not provide. Selling drugs in the streets was a way of getting material things such as money, a nice car, expensive clothing and gold chains which give him a higher status. Milton explained:

> It's important because people look at you. They look up to you. You're going to be a leader. You're not going to be a follower. You won't be like everybody else. I want to be recognized. I want to be known.

Participants displayed an acquired absence of taking responsibility for their learning and initiative in improving their academic performance and appropriately using the resources available. Participants indicated needing external support in order to learn how to take responsibility for their learning. In this respect, teachers, counselors, and parents played a crucial role as discussed before. In addition, participants indicated being aware of some of the school's alternatives available to help them overcome their academic difficulties, but they did not use those resources appropriately. For example, Yvellise was a quiet ninth grader who appreciated the availability of some of her teachers to answer her questions; however, she was uncomfortable asking them for help. For this reason, she preferred to try to solve things by herself or by getting one of her sisters to help her. Rose Marie acknowledged that in being part of the Upward Bound Program, she could get academic help from tutors, but these tutors are only available on Saturday and she pointed out that Saturdays were the only free day she had to spend with her boyfriend.

Summary

In summary, participants who underachieved in school reported that family factors influenced their academic performance. Conflicting family relationships, an unhappy home climate, minimal parental academic guidance and support, as well as inconsistent parental monitoring of students' achievement-oriented activities, and inappropriate parental expectations had a negative impact on the participants' academic achievement.

The school experiences of high ability underachievers participating in this investigation also had a negative impact on the expression of their high abilities and their opportunities to reach the highest levels. Based on the data gathered in this study, high ability underachievers were sometimes ignored by administrators, teachers, and counselors who did not understand or encourage them to meet their potential. Administrators, teachers, and counselors were not fully aware of these students' needs, and their schooling, learning, and counseling experiences tended to be inappropriate. Consequently, these students had school experiences which jeopardized their chances of succeeding academically in school.

In terms of community factors, the combination of negative social conditions such as violence, prejudice, and few opportunities for constructive entertainment influenced the identity formation and learning disposition of participants. Finally, participants indicated that they experienced a variety of personal and psychological difficulties which reinforced their underachievement in school. These students perceived themselves as lacking perseverance and were confused about their own self worth, and were at a loss about how to cope with their personal as well as academic difficulties.

CHAPTER 7: Research Questions, Discussion, Grounded Theory, and Implications

In this chapter, the research questions that guided the study are addressed, as are the cross-cultural differences that emerged between the majority of students in this study who achieved and underachieved, as well as gender differences between male and female students who achieved and underachieved in school. These findings are discussed in relation to the review of research presented in Chapter 2. The theory that emerged from this study is discussed, and in the final section, the implications of the study are reviewed.

Research Question 1. What do talented students in an urban high school expect from their school experience?

The young people who achieved in this study were students who remained in the urban school district throughout their elementary and middle school experiences. Many other academically talented young people did not. For example, several of the participants in this study spoke of peers who were academically talented in elementary school who had not made it to high school. Several young women became pregnant and dropped out of school. According to participants in this study, several other high potential young men dropped out after becoming involved in drugs and gangs or becoming fathers and having to support their children. Other bright young people from this urban area transferred into suburban schools through a program that removes talented students with potential and places them in schools in which they will have more opportunities for success in their academic work. Still others left public education after having been lured to area private schools which offer large scholarships to recruit talented minorities. The students who were involved in this study were those who succeeded in staying in school, and some of them were consistently successful at achieving in school, while some achieved only periodically, and still others underachieved almost all of the time. The degree to which they achieved, the circumstances surrounding their achievement, and the sometimes rapid movement into patterns of underachievement characterized the experiences of the students described in this study.

The high ability achievers in the study generally believed they were getting a good education at South Central High School. They were usually satisfied with their curricular experiences and they believed South Central was a good school. They had no desire to attend private schools or high schools in nearby suburban settings. At times, they were frustrated with the bureaucracy of the high school and how it impeded student progress in creating school spirit, yet they thought it was worth continuing to strive for a better school experience. They did not give up on their school and they appeared to sincerely believe in many students, especially those who were interested in achieving, and the teachers who supported them.

These young people realized that some of their teachers were not inspirational, or dedicated, but believed that many teachers were dedicated to the student population. They thought South Central's faculty did a good job, and several participants stated they had no complaints about the quality of their education. They realized that recent budget cuts had eliminated several course offerings and the size of their classes was larger, yet they continued to believe an urban education was valuable. These achievers consistently acknowledged the importance of the honors classes they took at South Central and the appropriate level of challenge within these classes.

An interesting finding emerged about the teachers appreciated most by this group. These teachers were noted for being good teachers not because of their subject-area expertise, teaching strategies or methodology, but rather because of certain common characteristics. The participants appreciated teachers who cared about them as young adults, and who treated them with respect and kindness. For example, they appreciated the nurturing quality of the English teacher who supported them at athletic events, the counselor who listened to problems, or the coach who had group discussions with the team. Remarks made throughout the interviews with these young people provided much evidence that they appreciated "teachers who cared" over content specialists. The following quotes were representative of the types of statements which were repeatedly made and which provide a powerful message to educators: "I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for Coach Brogan," or "Mrs. Lowell always has a room full of kids after school because kids go there for extra help or just to talk to her about anything."

Cultural differences were noted in student perceptions of their experiences. First, it was clear in this school setting that African American students were not proportionately represented in honors or advanced classes or in the high achieving culture created in the school. When counselors, teachers or students who were asked for names of high achieving African American students for possible inclusion in this study, many were shocked or surprised to realize how few junior or seniors who were achieving at high levels were mentioned. Wallace, the football star was frequently mentioned, as was one African American female student in this study who was a high achieving student in many areas. However, in the senior class that graduated at the conclusion of the first year of data gathering for this study, only one African American male and one African American female were identified who qualified for inclusion in the study, as delineated in the criteria outlined in Chapter 3. In order to identify a larger group of African American students for inclusion in the study, the researchers had to screen the junior, sophomore, and finally, the freshman class. Many leads were followed in attempts to identify female and male high ability African American students who either achieved or underachieved in school. Many of the females who had been identified as high ability students in elementary schools had been pregnant and were raising their own children. A smaller number of students had received scholarships and were attending private schools. In several cases, we could not locate high potential African American students who had achieved at high levels in elementary or middle schools. Several had dropped out, some had supposedly transferred to other schools, but could not be found on the lists of students who attended those schools. It is clear that many high potential African American students in this urban area did not achieve at the levels that might have been expected given their performance in elementary or middle school. The African American males dealt with the stereotype of the African American, male teenager and tried to stay committed to academic excellence despite peer pressures. The African American females who achieved did not date or have romantic connections with others. Instead, they stayed focused on their immediate goals of doing well in school, and on their future goals of college, and professional careers, such as teaching or medicine. The absence of African American students in this culture of achievement, especially during the last two years of high school, is certainly indicative of the need for further research on issues relative to achievement which must be addressed for this group of young people.

Second, Hispanic students (the majority of whom were of Puerto Rican heritage) achieved at high levels in this high school in which the majority of students were Hispanic. The achievement of the Puerto Rican students who were studied in this research indicates that students, many of whom were bilingual and who came from low socioeconomic backgrounds, had high levels of achievement despite cultural differences, economic deprivation, and family problems such as their parents' divorce or the drug or gang problems of their siblings. The Hispanic students who immigrated from Puerto Rico often

viewed their success in school as a product of the higher quality American education their parents wanted for their children.

The high ability underachievers had different opinions concerning their expectations for South Central High School. Students from all cultures generally found their curricular experiences boring and they indicated that their classes did not match their preferred learning style. They believed courses were often irrelevant and several young people in this group remarked that they needed more hands-on learning experiences. An auto mechanics enthusiast was sleeping in courses that provided only subject matter from a textbook. Another participant complained of not enough hands-on time in Tech Prep classes. An artist was frustrated in a structured art room with only two weeks to complete each assignment that he wanted to perfect. One participant who appreciated English literature was turned off by his teachers' selection of books and believed he could only relate to curriculum which was up to date and appealed to the current needs and interests of young people in an urban setting. In his opinion, *Pride and Prejudice* should not be read in a current English class because *Down These Mean Streets* was far more exciting and meaningful.

Though they found their course content meaningless at times and were frustrated because their talents or strength areas were not being nurtured, the underachievers also valued teachers who appreciated them as young people. These participants did not ask for curricular experts but rather, they wanted people who valued them as individuals. The underachievers had lower expectations for their school than the achievers. Their frustration with the system led to apathy and some of them turned to the negative influences in their environment. The students who underachieved also had personal problems that they experienced related to family issues such as problems in their homes, negative sibling issues, and absence of parental help or monitoring. They also had difficulty with peer networks and the negative use of unstructured time. The factors identified as specific to the Puerto Rican students who underachieved in school and who participated in this research are discussed in Research Question 7.

Research Question 2. What support systems (family, school, community) are recognized by talented students in an urban environment?

As discussed previously, the high ability achievers found support systems in their families, former and current teachers, coaches, counselors, and administrators at South Central High School as well as adults in the urban community. These support systems occurred both within the regular school setting and in the after school and summer extracurricular activities which these students pursued. A first grade teacher planted a seed and encouraged her student to reach for the stars and never accept the word can't as part of his daily vocabulary. A counselor helped several participants realize there was a world beyond the housing projects and provided them with summer enrichment opportunities on college campuses. Following these experiences, most of the achieving students had new aspirations for a college degree in elementary education. Following the city-wide science fair, an administrator encouraged an athlete to pursue his scientific interests and continue to bring pride back to South Central High School. Community members in the city stopped the young athlete in a department store and encouraged him to continue striving for championships. An Upward Bound tutor helped another student with her struggles in English. The Centerfield businessman directing the local chapter of Junior Achievement inspired a young entrepreneur to work hard. A swim coach created a caring, family-like environment where young people were comfortable being themselves and worked as a close-knit team to maintain their history of championships.

The high ability underachievers consistently sought support systems, but they were not always successful in finding them. They turned to relationships with young people from outside of their high school environment. One participant traveled to the Bronx with his peers and became intrigued with gangs and street life. Another young man wanted his neighborhood childhood friends to continue hanging out with him and asked that they not nag him about his lack of motivation in school. A star linebacker on the South Central football team could not get beyond trite pep talks from his coach when he really cried out for a father figure he had yearned for as a child. Some of the underachieving girls became romantically involved with young men which further exacerbated their underachievement by taking more time away from their schoolwork. Only a few of these young people who underachieved succeeded in finding supportive adults at South Central High School. A car enthusiast found the auto mechanics teacher who encouraged him and a quiet, soft-spoken young gentleman sought his swim coach for support. Relationships with guidance counselors were not helpful since the underachievers regarded the counselors primarily as schedule changers. Several of the young people suffered from a lack of familial support and family issues affected their underachievement. Sibling rivalry affected the way several of the students performed in school while others dealt with homes filled with tension, hardships, and constant struggles between parents and children.

Research Question 3. What views do talented students hold of their urban high school environment?

The high ability achievers regarded their high school environment with pride and with one major concern. They thought South Central High School was a good school yet they were worried about the influence of gangs infiltrating their school. One remarked, "South Central High School would be an excellent school if we could only get rid of the gangs." One young man expressed the feelings of the group when he voiced his opinion of the tension in school caused by gangs,

> Tension wise, I am getting pretty sick of it. I can't say it's affecting me. I am unable to discern what is affecting me environmentally from my own personal stress. The gang issue makes me sick. Do they have to go around acting like a bunch off hoodlums? Can't we treat each other as civilized people? What's wrong with this picture? You then wonder why the talent in the suburban schools is amplified in the press!

These young people found they defended their school to people they met from suburban high schools, and they were constantly reporting how they fought the stereotype of the tough, apathetic urban teenager when they left their school setting. They also reported how surprised teenagers from outside their district were when they came to South Central High School for any special event and found the school to be clean and well-organized and the students to be friendly and very much like suburban teenagers.

The participants in the study who were involved in honors classes believed they had competition in their academic setting and they enjoyed that. They realized there was apathy on the part of some of the student body, but they explained that apathy by pointing to the hardships faced at home by so many of the students, and the resulting resilience developed by some of the students who succeeded academically. One participant in the study expressed this eloquently and stated:

> There are people who come to this school every day so they can get a warm meal and a safe place to stay. Some people come here from a house where it is twenty degrees inside. They didn't sleep well that night because of the yelling going on

> next door. These people come to school every day and they still manage to shine. They work their hardest. So what if they don't wear the latest designer jeans.

The achievers often found themselves frustrated with the bureaucracy of the educational system, but they worked within it to make their school a better place. They were adamant in their beliefs that they were better off in an urban setting because of the cultural diversity their school offered. They also believed they were better individuals because of the variety of people they interacted with, and they knew their experiences in their urban high school prepared them with a more realistic view of the world outside. The underachievers regarded their high school classrooms as boring places, but the school itself was their social meeting place. The majority of them were not involved in any activities related to school. They saw the environment as part of their problem and many admitted they chose a peer group that negatively influenced them and led them into disciplinary trouble. Because of their unstructured time, their school environment became a place to seek adventure in inappropriate ways. Several of them placed the blame for their lack of success on school related issues. One student captured this feeling when he said:

> It's a place to hang out. Everybody like me stays in school for social reasons. They get to see their friends here every day. The surroundings rub off on me. It's not the school. It's the behavior.

However, as discussed earlier in the chapter, several other students who were underachieving provided insight into the environmental, family, and personal problems that they acknowledge contributed to their underachievement.

Research Question 4. What relationships guide the behaviors, attitudes, and aspirations of talented students in an urban environment?

As part of their strong belief in self, the high ability achievers had definite aspirations. The supportive relationships that helped to shape and strengthen their belief in self were those which directed their realistic goals for the future. The personal qualities, strengths and talents of the young people were aligned with their aspirations. The young man with strong religious beliefs and moral convictions planned a career of Christian philanthropy. Several sensitive young people whose interests and strengths had always been science-related were planning careers to help improve the environment. One young man who worked with handicapped students also thought he might consider a future with the Peace Corps. Several adult relationships supported the strong belief in self of these young people which, in turn, influenced their aspirations. This strong belief in self has been noted in studies by urban researchers (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993). For example, a guidance counselor and a sixth grade teacher inspired one bilingual student in the study to pursue a career in education because he thought the student might help to change the lives of other young children facing problems in their urban environment. The adults who influenced these young people included some current and previous teachers, coaches, counselors, parents, and some other relatives. A network of high achieving peers also contributed to the positive relationships that helped enable some of the young people in this study to achieve.

The high ability underachievers had aspirations that were not aligned with their current performance in school. Though they each had high academic ability and potential, there seemed to be confusion or no match at all between their strength areas and their choices for the future. When their talents matched their aspirations, the plan of how to realize the goal was either unrealistic or not being followed. One participant in this study who planned to use athletic scholarships to get to college continued to fail his classes and thought college recruiters would overlook his dismal academic record. The young artist

who wanted to pursue a degree in commercial art, found an advocate in a street artist, but he continued to skip classes every day. Some of the young people in this study experienced extremely stressful or negative home situations in which poverty, as well as family dysfunction due to problems with parents or siblings, existed. In some cases, the underachievers also had role models who were inconsistent and provided no direct path to follow to achieve their goals or realize their dreams.

Research Question 5. What gender differences exist between talented students (across cultures) who achieve and underachieve in school?

Female high achieving students did not date or become romantically involved, were extremely supportive of other achieving students (especially other female students), were involved in multiple activities, were independent, resilient, and dedicated to a career. Female underachieving students were often involved with boyfriends, let family problems influence their achievement, were unmotivated, used time unwisely, were negatively influenced by their peers and had unreal aspirations. They rarely caused trouble in school and were often unrecognized as having high abilities. Male achievers had a network of high achieving peers, positive personal traits, reasonable career aspirations, and were also involved in multiple activities. Male underachievers were more likely to cause behavioral problems in school, sought and maintained negative peer relationships, were negatively influenced by home and family problems and problems in the urban environment. Neither female or male underachievers possessed belief in self exhibited by both male and female students who achieved in school. Specific cultural gender differences are discussed in subsequent questions.

Research Question 6. What experiences do talented Puerto Rican students who achieve and underachieve perceive as contributing to their underachievement?

Puerto Rican participants in this study acknowledge that family, school, community, and personal characteristics contributed to their underachievement. The families of all of the Puerto Rican students participating in this investigation shared six common characteristics including:

(a) low income circumstances;
(b) low parental educational attainment and/or formal education;
(c) low-skill parental occupations;
(d) mother as the dominant figure;
(e) parental perception of schooling as important; and
(f) parental desire to have their children succeed in school and life in general.

Diverse family factors accounted for the underachievement of high ability Puerto Rican students. These family factors influenced students in different ways and the degree or level of impact of these family factors upon the students varied in each case. Not all of the participants experienced the same family difficulties. The participants for this investigation perceived five family-related experiences as contributing to their underachievement. These five factors were: (1) strained relationship with one or both parents, and/or siblings; (2) tense home climate; (3) minimal parental academic guidance or support; (4) inconsistent parental monitoring of students' achievement-oriented activities at home; and (5) inappropriate parental expectations.

Participants believed that the central personal factor influencing their academic performance was their tendency to give up easily. They also reported feeling distressed by personal concerns and problems, and experiencing confusion about their own efficacy and worthiness. Finally, they discussed their procrastination and defensive attitude towards

difficult situations. Participants had several personal concerns related to their physical appearance and new interests. For example, one male reported being concerned about his weight:

> I know I'm not Mr. America, but I know I'm not ugly. [However] I'd like to change my weight. I'm a little overweight. I'm trying to go on a diet. It's kind of hard. Because someone will say, "Let's go out for pizza." And that's not really a diet kind of food. McDonald's and all that. I'm used to fast food. Not really healthy. Just grease. That's it. It's kind of hard. . . . In the summertime, I'm going to start running the track at Cohn Park during my free time. I'm going to start running and walking, and riding my bike. Some kind of exercise.

Another male participant expressed concerns regarding the glasses he got in fourth grade because he could not read from far away. He says "I liked the fact that I could see. I didn't care what anybody thought then." However, by seventh grade, he did not like wearing his glasses. As a result, he had contact lenses in eighth grade but could not use them because they made his eyes red and they watered. In high school, he decided not to use either eye glasses or contact lenses even though he could not see the board. In this respect, one of the female students also believed that wearing eyeglasses was highly associated with being a "studious" person or a "nerdy" looking person.

The school experiences of the Puerto Rican high ability students who underachieved did not enable them to demonstrate their high abilities. Puerto Rican high ability underachievers perceived that they were sometimes neglected by administrators, teachers, and counselors who did not really understand or encourage their potential. Administrators, teachers, and counselors were not fully aware of these students' needs thus their schooling, learning, and counseling experiences tended to be inappropriate. Consequently, these students perceived that their school experiences had jeopardized their chances of succeeding in school.

In terms of community factors, distressing social conditions, such as violence, prejudice, and few opportunities for constructive entertainment, influenced the identity formation and learning disposition of participants. Finally, these young people indicated experiencing a variety of personal and psychological difficulties which reinforced the stress they felt. These students perceived themselves as lacking in perseverance. They also felt confused about their won self-efficacy and worth, and were often at a loss in coping with their personal as well as academic difficulties.

As shown in Tables 5, 6, and 7, a variety of external and internal forces as well as academic and non-academic factors play significant roles in the school experiences of high ability Puerto Rican students. The most salient factors related to either their schooling experiences or personal issues. Secondary factors reflected the impact of family and the environment in the immediate community. Gender differences were clearly evident between males and females. As noted in Table 5, females who achieved had strong family relations; a strong sense of self which helped them to resist external forces; good adult support systems in school and at home; and a strong sense of efficacy, autonomy, and proactive responsibilities about their own learning. They also had a positive, stable peer network, although they did not date or have intimate relationships with males at this time in their lives. Therefore, to some extent, they rejected the cultural notion that to be a respected Puerto Rican female, one had to have a relationship with a male and/or have a child because of the high esteem with which motherhood is regarded.

Table 5

Factors Influencing the Academic Performance of High Ability Puerto Rican Female Students

Puerto Rican Female Achievers	Puerto Rican Female Underachievers
Negotiated and balanced (non-directive) parental expectation	Parental lack of merging academic and personal expectations for their daughters
Higher levels of parental sensitivity (flexibility) including emotional support	Lower parental sensitivity (inflexibility) and emotional support
Positive family relationships	Strained relationship with family members
No dating or intimate relationships with males through conscious choices	Active relationships (some intimate) with males
Moderate parental academic guidance and support (encourage children to look for help)	Minimal parental academic guidance (evidence of verbal encouragement but no actions)
Expanded access to more appropriate classes	Unrewarding curriculum
Adult support network	Lack of supportive adults (especially, counselors and teachers)
Internal locus of control	Unstable locus of control
Strong sense of efficacy	Low sense of efficacy
Strong sense of autonomy	Lower sense of autonomy
Less vulnerable (stronger sense of self)	Highly vulnerable to external forces (teachers' attitudes and hostile environment)
Higher level of assertiveness and proactivity	Less assertive
Appropriate choice of coping strategies	Inappropriate coping strategies (procrastination, passiveness, defensive attitude, and limited self-regulation)
Stable peer network	Inappropriate peer network

As mentioned previously in this report, and indicated in Table 6, high ability Puerto Rican students, particularly males, started to display behavioral manifestations of their underachievement in upper elementary school. Male underachievers were similar, in several regards, to the female underachievers. The male students, however, displayed an absence of academic self regulation. The males also believed that their sense of independence was threatened by adults who tried to help them achieve in school. The males who underachieved in school seemed to make a conscious choice to underachieve in order to maintain or reaffirm their independence. Nevertheless, evidence exists that their underachievement gradually increased during their early schooling experiences. The development of students' high abilities (achievers and underachievers) and access to appropriate learning experiences commensurate with their high potential were thwarted in elementary school. Thus, they were left inadequately prepared for the academic demands of middle school. For example, these students did not develop advanced learning strategies or study skills before entering middle school.

The students' emotional and social development was also thwarted. Personal factors and individual differences emerged as a decisive force for high ability Puerto Rican students. Both achievers and underachievers were driven to preserve a sense of self to face the new demands of secondary school. However, the underachievers' development of a belief in self was overcome by less favorable beliefs about themselves. The achievers were able to use their own resourcefulness to find external help when needed. On the other hand, the negative academic feedback received by the underachievers dramatically threatened their sense of self. Their vulnerability to external forces (family, teachers, environment, etc.) increased, leading them to try to establish a belief in self in non-academic areas. In this respect, peers represented the most readily available means for establishing a sense of self outside of academic areas, and so many of the underachievers turned to gangs, social relationships, and other forms of peer support which negatively influenced their work in school. Furthermore, due to the nature of their underachievement (low academic achievement in classes), these students were prevented from experiencing more appropriate curricular experiences and participating in extracurricular activities like the ones experienced by the high achievers.

Gender differences existed in the Puerto Rican participants' achievement in school, as indicated in Table 7. High ability Puerto Rican females exhibited fewer behavioral signs of underachievement. The underachievement of high ability Puerto Rican males was much more obvious than the underachievement of students of other cultures. High ability Puerto Rican females also appeared to have a more pragmatic sense of their future than the males. Interpersonal relationships also had a major impact in the lives of high ability Puerto Rican females.

Table 6

Factors Influencing the Academic Performance of High Ability Puerto Rican Male Students

Puerto Rican Male Achievers	Puerto Rican Male Underachievers
High parental expectations of their son's academic performance	Low parental expectations of their son's academic performance
Strained family relationships as a source of motivation	Strained family relationships as a negative force
Minimal parental academic guidance	Minimal parental academic guidance and limited behavioral support for academic excellence (beyond verbal encouragement)
Sensitive counseling	Questionable counseling
More access to appropriate classes (honor courses) and special programs	Unrewarding curriculum and limited participation in extracurricular activities or special programs
Resourcefulness (use of a wide variety of more appropriate coping strategies)	Inappropriate coping strategies including lack of self-regulation, non-proactivity, defensiveness, and unwillingness to conform to the rules
Ability to ignore or cope with external forces	High vulnerability to external forces (teachers' attitudes, ethnic prejudice)
Strong self-efficacy and belief in self	Damaged sense of efficacy (including doubts about competence or ability)
Balanced sense of independence and interdependence	Feeling of having their independence threatened by others
Supportive academic and personal peer network	Inappropriate peer network
Motivated by hostile environment to learn to cope or to work to actively improve their environment	Troubled and influenced by hostile environment

Table 7

Gender Differences Influencing the Academic Performance of High Ability Puerto Rican Students

Puerto Rican Female Students	Puerto Rican Male Students
Need for a high degree of assertiveness Belief in self when developing friendships and love relationships	Higher expectations for intimate and strong relationships (especially for male developing underachievers)
Higher degree of survival to the extent of performing better than males even when underachieving	Extreme choices (high achievement or very low achievement)
More realistic postsecondary and career expectations	Less realistic postsecondary and career expectations (no contingency plans)

Research Question 7. What experiences do talented African American students who achieve and underachieve perceive as contributing to their underachievement?

As noted in Tables 8 and 9, many of the factors influencing the high achievement and lower levels of achievement in African American students were similar to those exhibited by students across all cultures, and were also identified as influential in the achievement of Puerto Rican students. As there was only one African American female student who was identified as an underachieving student in this study, only a discussion of the factors that emerged from the data of the high achieving students are discussed. Comparisons of male students who achieved and underachieved are made. For the female African American students, clear trends emerged regarding parental expectations. Mothers in particular encouraged their daughters to excel in school without being actively involved in their daughters' education. The majority of the mothers of this group had never been in the high school their daughter attended, but their support was clear. Their daughters did their homework, put their academic studies ahead of their social lives, did not date, and often were deeply connected with their families and their churches. They had a positive circle of peers and were supported by these young people to continue to achieve academically. They were independent, believed in themselves, and wanted a career that would enable them to use their talents.

Differences between male African American students who achieved and underachieved in school are listed in Table 9. Male students who achieved in school differed from their underachieving peers in a number of ways. The parents of the achievers were much more involved in their children's academic work, and they encouraged these students to do their work and also encouraged their academic task commitment. The students who achieved were more involved in challenging academic classes, had high self concepts and belief in self, displayed leadership qualities and resilience to cope with family problems and low socio-economic home situations, and had solid and realistic plans for their futures. They participated in many extracurricular activities, special programs, and sports, and were surrounded by a supportive group of peers from different cultural groups.

Table 8

Factors Influencing the Academic Performance of High Ability African American Female Students

African American Female Achievers
Clear (directive) parental expectations, especially from mothers
Parental emotional support and positive family relationships
No dating or intimate relationships with males through conscious choices
Some parental academic guidance and support
Challenging classes
Adult support network
Internal locus of control, strong sense of efficacy and belief in self
Religious convictions
Stable peer network

Conflicting family relationships have been mentioned in the literature as a contributor to the underachievement of gifted students from several cultural, linguistic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Clark (1983) claimed that conflict between family members occurs frequently for African American low achievers. Other researchers such as Whitmore (1980) and Rimm (1984) identified poor parent-child relationships and unhappy home climates as contributors to the underachievement of Anglo high ability/gifted students. However, most researchers agree that the specific causal conditions for the conflicting family relationships are unique for each student, playing a major role in determining the degree of impact upon the student's academic achievement. In this respect, specific family and cultural values exacerbate the problem. For example, Puerto Rican high ability adolescents who are underachieving in school experience a strong need for autonomy and independence. However, Puerto Rican adolescents may experience further difficulties because their culture fosters family unity, interdependence, and even dependency of older children on parents. This research finding parallels Rimm and Lowe's (1988) assertion that Hispanic families are less likely than non-Hispanic White families to foster the type of independence that may improve academic performance.

Minimal parental academic guidance or support, inconsistent parental monitoring of students' achievement-oriented activities at home, and inappropriate parental expectations have also been stated as contributors to the low achievement of high ability/gifted as well as non-gifted students (Clark, 1983; Rimm & Lowe, 1988; Whitmore, 1980). According to Dornbusch and Ritter (1987), appropriate academic encouragement helps develop internal motivation and improves academic performance. The parents of the participants in this investigation expressed concern about their children's academic life; however, they felt helpless regarding their ability to provide academic guidance and support to their children. They encouraged their children to do well in school, but their limited academic background and knowledge of resources impeded the provision of more demanding academic guidance or support.

Table 9

Factors Influencing the Academic Performance of High Ability African American Male Students

African American Male Achievers	African American Female Underachievers
High parental expectations of academic performance and strong parental involvement in school	Low parental expectations of academic performance
Negative family relationships as a source motivation and resilience	Negative family relationships as a negative of force
Minimal parental academic guidance	Minimal parental academic guidance and limited behavioral support for academic excellence (beyond verbal encouragement)
Appropriately challenging classes (honors extensive involvement in extracurricular activities and special programs	Unrewarding curriculum and limited courses), participation in extracurricular activities or special programs
Resourcefulness (use of a wide variety of strategies such as problem solving)	Inappropriate strategies including lack of self-regulation, poor work habits
Ability to ignore or cope with external forces	Affected by external forces (teachers' attitudes, ethnic prejudice)
Strong self efficacy, self concept, and belief in self	Low sense of efficacy, self concept (including doubts about competence or abilities)
Positive personality and personal qualities (leadership, task commitment)	Absence of leadership and task commitment Lack of academic task commitment
Academic task commitment	
Supportive academic and personal peer network	Inappropriate peer network
Motivated by hostile environment to learn to cope or to work to actively improve their environment	Troubled and influenced by hostile environment
Solid plan for the future	

The findings of this investigation indicated that five major school and classroom factors negatively influenced the academic performance of Puerto Rican high ability students participating in this investigation. A lack of early exposure to appropriate academic or curricular experiences, an absence of opportunities to develop and/or improve a school work discipline, negative interactions with teachers, an unrewarding curriculum, and questionable counseling experiences constrained students' path to success. Early identification and provision of appropriate educational services plays a crucial role in the student's development of his/her high abilities or giftedness. Unfortunately, schools frequently use inappropriate screening, identification, and selection procedures, especially when assessing students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds. On the other hand, school experiences that encourage academic achievement are characterized by high levels of support, satisfaction, and organization (Fraser, 1992). Participants in this study described their schooling experiences as boring, unrewarding in terms of personal meaning and interests, and unsatisfactory, leading them to experience other motivational difficulties, which in turn fostered low achievement levels. Ramsden, Martin, and Bowden (1988) also found that students, under these circumstances, meet only the minimal academic requirements. In addition, students who underachieve in school do not experience a sense of excitement nor intellectual engagement in learning. In this respect, the findings of this investigation support that some culturally diverse gifted students were "turned off" by the schools. In addition, this study corroborates Alvarez's (1983) assertion that school is the major but not the only contributor to achievement among Puerto Rican children.

In terms of community or social factors, the participants in this study identified the hostile environment including gang-related incidents, ethnic prejudice, and few opportunities for constructive entertainment as a contributor to their underachievement. Ford (1992) found that similar social forces influenced the motivation and academic achievement of African American students.

Finally, personal factors, insufficient perseverance, low sense of efficacy, and inappropriate coping strategies were identified as contributors to the underachievement of high ability students. These findings provide some support to Willig, Harnisch, Hill, and Maehr (1983) who claimed that Hispanic students may experience some difficulty in recognizing their abilities and talents. The participants of this investigation reported knowing about their high ability, but were not confident of the extent of their potential, indeed self-doubt was evident. Participants of this investigation displayed a low sense of efficacy that further influenced their levels of perseverance and effort.

As part of the review of the literature for this investigation, a study by Stevenson, Chen, and Uttal (1990) was reviewed. These researchers concluded that something must occur after the elementary school years that destroys the children's enthusiasm and opportunities to succeed in high school and college. In this respect, the findings of this investigation do not fully confirm these researchers' suggestion. The findings of this investigation suggest that the onset of underachievement or low achievement occurs in the early grades. However, visible manifestations of underachievement may not become evident until late elementary school. According to the findings of this investigation, underachievement was not a phenomenon that occurred quickly, but rather, over time. Academic underachievement varies in intensity and behavioral manifestations of underachievement vary.

Ogbu's theories have been suggested to explain the underachievement of high ability urban youth (1974, 1985, 1987, 1991). Ogbu was one of the first social scientists to challenge the cultural deprivation theory discussed in Chapter 2. Ogbu discusses differences between immigrant minorities who seek a better life, and non immigrant, or "caste-like," minorities, people whose status in American society is a result of slavery,

conquest or colonization. According to Ogbu, caste-like minorities, such as African Americans and Mexican-Americans, not only experience discrimination from the dominant White culture, but they also get caught in a web of inferiority and self-defeat that discourages them from living up to their potential. Ogbu (1987) believes that the mistrust of the American education by African Americans leads to their exclusion from the high quality education received by Whites and this exclusion hampers the academic performance of African American children.

Studies that support Ogbu's theories have been conducted recently. Ethnographic research indicates that urban African American youngsters may define academic success as more appropriate for Whites. Fordham (1988) and Fordham and Ogbu (1986) examined the concept of racelessness as a factor in the academic achievement of African American students in a high school in Washington, DC and found that high achieving students were more willing to identify with the beliefs and values of the dominant culture than less successful students. This study supports findings that indicate that high achieving students identified with the beliefs and values of a "culture of high achievement." The dominant culture of the high school was Puerto Rican. No differences were found in the perceptions of beliefs and values of high achieving students across cultures; there was, however, lower proportion of African American students in the "culture of achievement" in the high school.

Other social scientists have attempted to explain minority school failure by examining social and psychological factors, family and community factors, as well as educational programmatic factors and have provided multiple theories or explanations regarding why students do not achieve academically (Trueba, 1988). Crocker (1987) maintained that the influence of social factors on underachievement has been underestimated and suggested underachievement among minority students may be due to social forces such as discrimination, prejudice, and low socioeconomic status. In this study, equal percentages of students who achieved and underachieved came from homes with low socioeconomic and experienced prejudice in their lives. Ford (1992) examined determinants of underachievement in high ability African American students, and her findings suggest that psychological factors played the greatest role in underachievement. Family and personal factors played a great role in underachievement of all students in this study, indicating that this was not just the case for African American students, but for other underachieving students as well.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Hispanic students often tend to be placed in classrooms or schools where children of limited English proficiency are the majority. This isolation in bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs may reduce possibilities for contact with English-speaking students. Schools may exacerbate the problem of isolation by grouping students according to language ability for instruction (Hyland, 1989). Little research exists on gifted bilingual students. In this study, the students who were bilingual and high achieving capitalized on their strengths and language was not an issue in their achievement. Likewise, students who were bilingual and did not achieve did not cite language difficulties as one of the reasons for their underachievement.

Many school districts point out that dropout rates among their African American and Hispanic students are relatively low (Kuykendall, 1992), but the data gathered in this study indicate that "dropping out" or leaving high school is still a major problem in urban high schools. In this study, enrollment in freshman year was over 700 and by senior year, enrollment was approximately 300.

Causes and Contributors of Underachievement

Underachievement is thought to be a behavior or a pattern of behaviors. What would cause a bright learner to engage in behaviors which deny ability? Research concerning underachievement among gifted students reveals many possible causal factors which include the following: biology, environment, self pressure, school pressure, peer pressure, parental pressure, boredom with school, and inappropriate teaching methods (Lukasic et al., 1992).

Some researchers refer to problems of the youngster as possible causes of underachievement. Shaw and Brown (1957) believed that bright underachievers might have a basic personality problem which causes the surface behavior of underachievement. In addition, the intellectual school pursuits may not be as rewarding to the youngster as interests outside of school (Fine, 1977). Purkey (1969) and Pirozzo (1982) also suggested that another potential cause may be personal adjustment problems. Because of the youngster's intelligence, it is often assumed that adjustment problems will be easily solved. Many assume that because some young people are so bright, they can cope with anything. With no help from caring adults, underachieving students often retreat, lose energy, and fail to achieve at their expected level (Perkins, 1976). In this study, family problems, personal problems, and environmental problems all had a major impact on underachievement.

Peer reactions may also play an important role in causing underachievement among bright students. If youngsters receive high grades, they might believe that their peers will not like or respect them. Desiring to be socially accepted, bright young people may hide their abilities (Ramos, 1975). This concept of "hiding one's ability" was not found in this study. Indeed, a peer group for high achievers often helped those who achieved to do well in school and most underachievers wanted to do well.

Many researchers point to the school environment as the place where bright students lose their interest and drive. Some teachers may be too easily satisfied with good work, and their low expectations may have a negative impact on the academic achievement of bright youngsters (Pirozzo, 1982). Some teachers may even be threatened by high ability students and, rather than provide them with creative activities, they continue with boring and repetitive work. The presence of low expectations, or teachers being threatened by high ability students, was not found in this study. Some teachers and counselors did not actively encourage the abilities of underachievers, but more often, once a bright student became involved in an unchallenging class, that student simply did not muster the energy or resources to be able to succeed. Once a young person began underachieving, it was as if he/she **climbed** onto the first step of the down staircase. Trying to reverse the direction is difficult, if not impossible.

A uniform finding in the literature was that underachievement is more characteristic of males than females. Generally, two or three males are designated as underachievers for every female (McCall, Evahn & Kratzer, 1992). In this study, it was easier to locate males who underachieved than it was females because some of the males who underachieved and stayed in school often were behavioral problems in school. Many young women who underachieved either dropped out of school because they were pregnant, or took clerical jobs or positions in service (waitresses, etc.).

Family Factors

Many demographic factors have been suggested with underachievement, but the results of research are unclear. Although some researchers have asserted that

underachievers are typically later born children with high-achieving older siblings, little consistency exists in the literature regarding birth order. Some researchers have found underachievers to be predominantly firstborn (Newman, Dember, & Krug, 1973), others show no difference (Goldberg, M., Bernhard, Kirschner, Hlavaty, Michelson, Goldberg, C., & Apel, 1959), and still others report that they are more likely to be later-born children. (Broman, Bien, & Shaughnessy, 1985; Musselman, 1942). No trend was found in this study regarding birth order.

Family size has also been examined as a factor related to the problem of underachievment. Some have suggested a tendency exists for underachievers to come from larger families (Asbury, 1974; Broman et al., 1985; Musselman, 1942; Zilli, 1971), although Goldberg and his colleagues (1959) reported no differences. In this study, no differences were found in the size of families between students who achieved and those who underachieved.

Whether or not a mother worked was not found to be a factor in the achievement or underachievement of students in this research. Although some data indicate higher percentages of working mothers among parents of underachievers (Kurtz & Swenson, 1951; Zilli, 1971), other researchers found no such relationship (Curry, 1961; Goldberg et al., 1959; Musselman, 1942; Passow & Goldberg, 1963). In this study, the mothers of the achieving students worked at positions requiring higher levels of education than did mothers of underachieving students.

Divorce has also been investigated as a factor in underachievement. It is commonly asserted that underachievers are more likely to come from disrupted and single-parent households (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982; Goldberg, M., 1959; Kurtz & Swenson, 1951; Passow & Goldberg, 1963; Zilli, 1971), although a few studies showed no differences or even the opposite (Gowan, 1957; Musselman, 1942). No differences were found in divorce rates between parents of students who achieved and underachieved in this study.

Behavioral Characteristics of Underachievers

A variety of personal and psychological characteristics have been attributed to underachievers and their parents, based often on clinical impressions and reports of professionals, teachers, and parents rather than on systematic, objective measurements and observations (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992). Generally, underachievers are believed to have poor self-perception, low self-concept, and low self-esteem, specially with regard to their academic abilities. They are often self-critical, fear both failure and success, and are anxious or nervous, especially over their performance. This study confirmed various personal characteristics associated with students who underachieved, in particular, low sense of self-efficacy and an absence of belief in self.

Numerous researchers have discovered underachieving gifted students with overall low self-esteem (Crittenden, Kaplan, & Heim, 1984; Saurenman & Michael, 1980; Fein, 1958; Thiel & Thiel, 1977; Whitmore, 1979, 1982; Zilli, 1971). Underachievers in this study also seemed to have lower self-esteem, as indicated by responses to various types of interview questions.

Research indicates that some students who underachieve have problems relating to authority figures such as their parents, teachers, and other adults. They are overly aggressive and hostile to authority figures, exhibit discipline problems and high rates of delinquency, lack self-control, and are irresponsible and unreliable (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992). This was the case with many of the students who underachieved in this study. However, some underachievers may express aggressive tendencies more passively

(Roth, 1970). This was also the case with other participants in this study. Some underachievers were behavioral problems, others were passive.

Grounded Theory

When examining the challenges that young people in urban schools face every day, we realize that some who reach their goals face greater obstacles than others. Some young children living in the projects go to sleep each night with the sound of drunken neighbors and drive-by shootings outside their bedroom window. What enables these young people to overcome their environment, graduate from high school, attend college, and become a productive member of society? Why do some of these young men and women then go on to provide for their parents and help their younger brothers and sisters? Why do other young people who live in more peaceful communities and face fewer hardships in life fail to succeed in school? Why do some succeed, while others fail?

The high school students from the urban housing project may serve as sources of inspiration to us, yet in this research project we have learned that young people who achieve have developed personal strategies to overcome environmental adversities. These young people attend our public schools and know what it is they want because they know who they are. They have developed a strong belief in self that provides them with energy, drive, and tools they need to face their challenges. This strong belief in self is the driving force that allows them to succeed in school, and to determine where they want to go in life.

In Figure 1, a preliminary model is provided to help understand how this belief in self evolved in the young people included in this study. More research will help to investigate whether these factors are present in other urban achieving students. The center of the diagram includes a solid core entitled belief in self and resilience. Several qualities merged to form this belief in self including: personality traits, such as a heightened sensitivity, a quality that allowed these young people to appreciate individual differences in people around them. They also had an inner will or an internal fortitude that helped to provide the strong drive to reach for their realistic aspirations or goals in life. This strong belief in self naturally incorporated aspirations, for these young people had dreams, goals, and visions of a future in which they would help to make the world a better place.

This strong belief in self was reinforced in these high achieving students at South Central High School in other ways as well. They had a network of high achieving peers who encouraged each other to achieve in school and in extracurricular activities. They were supported and nurtured by a variety of adults who helped them and who cared, supportive teachers who inspired, a counselor who listened and believed in them, a coach who thought of them as more than just athletes and cared about them as individuals. These adults helped to make a difference in how these students regarded themselves and whether they would achieve their goals.

Along with adults who cared, they had families who believed in them and their abilities. One young man had a family who prayed together and provided him with a deep spirituality, while many participants had parents who faced economic hardships but believed that tomorrow would be better and helped inspire their children to believe that they, too, would see a better day.

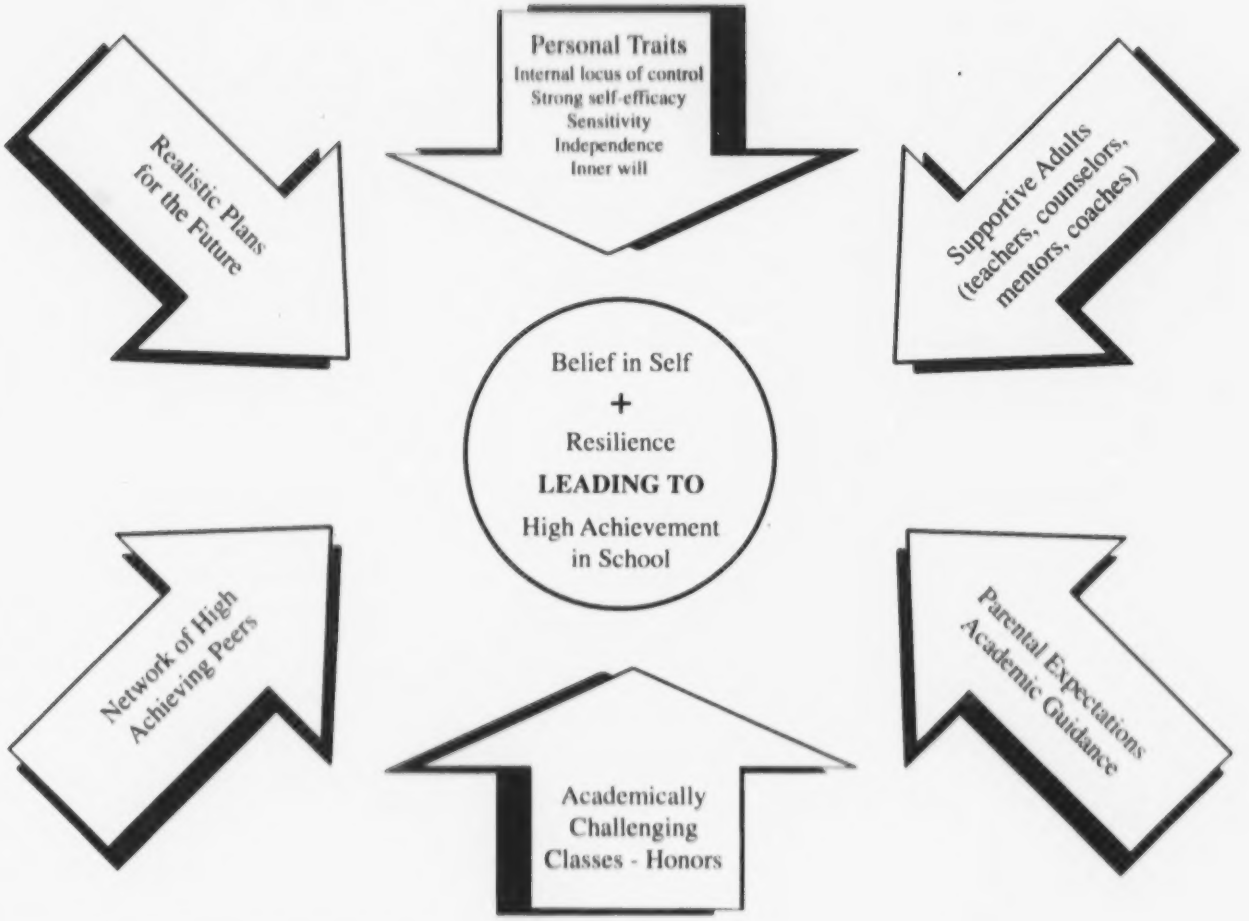

Figure 1. Factors influencing the achievement of talented urban students.

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Along with their strong families and other supportive adults in their lives, they became involved in a variety of experiences that allowed them to develop their talents, and to be exposed to another world outside their urban communities. They also had peer support which was readily available in their academic classes, their clubs, and all other extracurricular activities. The combination of family and peer support, support from significant adults and experiences in which they began to see themselves as valued individuals enabled their belief in self to become stronger and their resilience to develop. This resilience enabled this group of students to achieve despite the various problems their families faced, besides the poverty with which many lived, and besides the problems they faced growing up in an urban area.

While the achievers in this study were successful in school, the second group of young people were not. The perplexing issue of why other young people who attend the same school in the same environment come from the same cultural backgrounds, experience the same type of family, and have similar access to support systems in their school or community do not succeed. They vacillate in their journey, become filled with despair, are confused, and eventually end up losing their goal.

In Figure 2, a preliminary diagram is provided to explore this perplexing issue. A series of negative curricular experiences and counseling experiences combined with family issues in the lives of the young people who underachieved in school. Teachers did not address the learning styles or match the curriculum to how these young people preferred to learn. Issues at home, such as being overshadowed by a very intelligent, outgoing older sister or a straight A younger brother; a parent who drank heavily, or a religious belief system that was out of alignment with the values system of the family, added to the problem. All of these issues caused turmoil in the daily experiences of the young people who often had a dismal experience in school.

Students who underachieved reacted to the negative environment around them for excitement, and connected with other young people very much like themselves who negatively influenced them. Several young people were intrigued with gangs, while others were in constant trouble with their peers in study halls and the in-house suspension center. Together these young people became behavioral problems and faced disciplinary issues in school. These problems were often caused when they had too much unstructured time because students were not involved in positive experiences outside of their classrooms, they turned to their negative environment and troublesome friends for support. With an absence of support from teachers and peers, their aspirations became unrealistic or confused, and they continued to think they might achieve success despite their dismal school experiences. A football player thought college recruiters would ignore his dismal academic record and provide him with a scholarship. Another participant longed to become a commercial artist, yet he did not respond to his art teacher's advice concerning his work in the art room. The journey for these young people became a very tedious and upsetting experience, and they continued to look for direction as they struggled each day. Without the resilience to deal with the problems they encountered and without a strong belief in self, they did not have the opportunities to achieve.

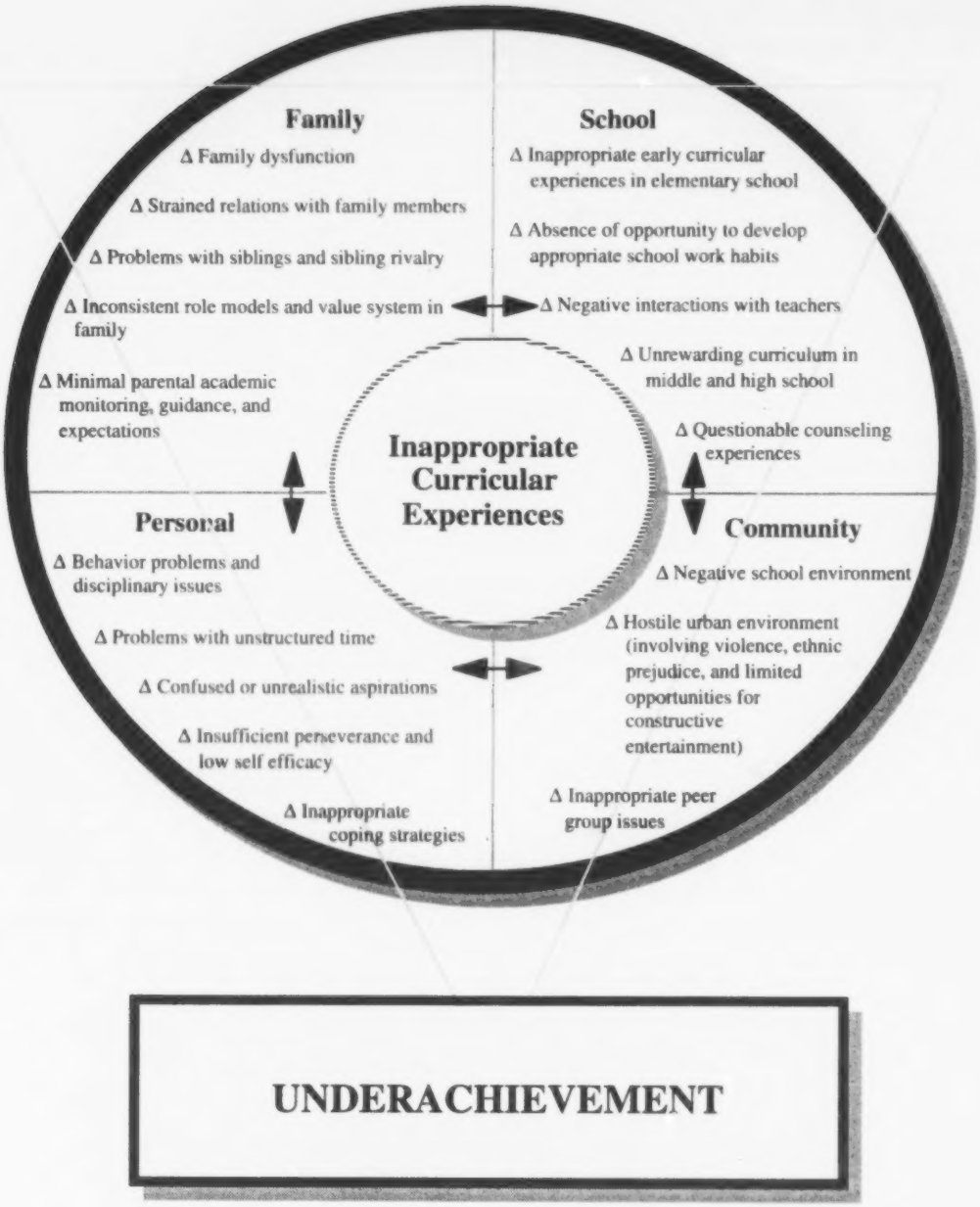
Family
Δ Family dysfunction
Δ Strained relations with family members
Δ Problems with siblings and sibling rivalry
Δ Inconsistent role models and value system in family
Δ Minimal parental academic monitoring, guidance, and expectations
School
Δ Inappropriate early curricular experiences in elementary school
Δ Absence of opportunity to develop appropriate school work habits
Δ Negative interactions with teachers
Δ Unrewarding curriculum in middle and high school
Δ Questionable counseling experiences
Inappropriate Curricular Experiences
Personal
Δ Behavior problems and disciplinary issues
Δ Problems with unstructured time
Δ Confused or unrealistic aspirations
Δ Insufficient perseverance and low self efficacy
Δ Inappropriate coping strategies
Community
Δ Negative school environment
Δ Hostile urban environment (involving violence, ethnic prejudice, and limited opportunities for constructive entertainment)
Δ Inappropriate peer group issues
UNDERACHIEVEMENT

Figure 2. Causal paradigm of underachievement for Puerto Rican and African American high ability male and female students.

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At the core of this figure are the early inappropriate experiences of these students. These curricular experiences during elementary school played a major role in the onset of these students' underachievement. Unchallenging academic curricula during elementary school had a negative impact on the students' perceived need to expend effort and to develop sophisticated study habits. Although students wereable to achieve high levels of academic performance in their early school years, their high abilities were not nurtured, and subsequent opportunities to achieve at high levels were increasingly less available. In other words, parents and teachers did not nurture these students' abilities and talents during their middle and high school years, and the path to success became more difficult.

Students struggled with perseverance, diligence, and effort during their middle and high school years. During this time, study skills also played a crucial role. For instance, the poorer the student's study skills, the higher the need for effort and perseverance. Furthermore, the absence of appropriate opportunities to develop students' discipline to work in school complicated the problem. Negative experiences during high school resulted from unrewarding curricular activities, scarcity of options for talent development, and questionable counseling experiences. For instance, gifted programs were not available for these high school students. In addition, the school efforts to provide enriching and motivating learning experiences within the regular curriculum usually occurred in the academic programs only, and provisions for students within the regular classrooms were at the discretion of already busy teachers. Under these circumstances, the individualization needed by these underachieving students was seldom provided. Learning did not focus on students' strengths; consequently, the abilities of these students were neglected.

Several personal, family, and community problems also negatively influenced students' willingness to persevere and cope with the difficult times. As this group of students had less resilience to cope with these problems, their academic performance suffered. Student's underachievement in school damaged their personal sense of efficacy and self-worth. The distressing community and social forces increasingly fostered attitudes of resistance and defensiveness among the students which influenced their mood and daily actions. This already puzzling picture was further influenced by the use of ineffective compensation strategies. (The subsidiary categories and their sub-categories surround the core category in the model depicted in Figure 2. The interactions between and within categories and sub-categories are represented by the arrows. The interaction of external and internal factors is represented by the inverted triangle which leads to the outcome of underachievement.)

In summary, the absence of nurturance of these students' high abilities during elementary school contributed to their underachievement. School, family, and personal experiences entangled students' life, provoking the onset or continuation of their academic underachievement.

Recommendations for Further Research

It is clear that additional research is needed on high ability students from various cultural and economic groups who achieve and underachieve in school. Future research should focus on designing, implementing, and assessing the impact of coordinated prevention and intervention programs. The present study identified several causal factors as perceived by high ability underachievers living in one urban area. How would the findings differ if the sample of students was larger and in a different urban setting? What other differences or similarities might be noted among cultural groups in different environments with Puerto Rican high ability underachievers living in Puerto Rico? and/or other Hispanic

groups? Due to the qualitative nature of this investigation, several other areas for research emerged. For instance, although some evidence emerged about the participants of this investigation's search for morality and spirituality, this evidence was not strong enough to be included in the findings of this investigation. For example, key informants showed concern and confusion about what will be considered "good" and "bad" in life. These concerns and confusions were evident during their discussion of their own hypotheses of life; beliefs, and values. In addition, a female participant manifested her interest in spiritual and moral issues through a discussion of her affiliation to a particular religious organization. A carefully designed qualitative research study on high ability students' search for meaning within various cultural groups may shed some light upon the phenomenon of underachievement as well as high achievement. Similarly, it would be promising to examine the role of perfectionism on the underachievement of high ability students from various cultural groups. In addition, it may be beneficial and interesting to carry out a research study addressing the direct consequences of community/social forces and conditions upon Puerto Rican and African American high ability/gifted students living in different areas (urban, suburban, and rural).

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